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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Nursing student killed by minor girl's kin over affair

KALABURAGI, 5 MARCH

A boy, 20, was hacked to death by a minor girl's relatives for allegedly having an affair with her. The deceased Abhishek, a native of Kalaburagi is a second-year nursing student in a para-medical college. They have both been in love for the last three years. When the matter came to be known by family members of the girl they strongly opposed their affair and severely warned the boy not to have any relationship with the girl. However, both were meeting and contacting over the phone regularly. Enraged by their affair girl's relatives severely assaulted him by using clubs and iron rods. *—Salar News*

Human-animal conflicts claim 2 more lives in Kerala

KOZHIKODE/THRISSUR, 5 MARCH

The issue of human-animal conflicts continued to haunt Kerala as two elderly persons lost their lives in attacks by wild animals in Kozhikode and Thrissur districts, respectively, on Tuesday. According to police, Abraham, a 70-year-old farmer, was attacked by an Indian gaur at his farm in Kakkayam area of Kozhikode district around 3 pm. Despite being rushed to Kozhikode Medical College Hospital, he succumbed to his injuries. In Thrissur, a 62-year-old woman named Valsawas attacked and killed by a wild elephant in a forest area near Athirappally on Tuesday afternoon. *—PTI*

Kerala to launch India's 1st govt OTT platform

T'PURAM, 5 MARCH

Kerala is poised to make waves in the digital entertainment realm with the launch of CSpace, India's inaugural government-backed OTT platform. Set to debut on Thursday, the platform aims to deliver a unique blend of informative and entertaining content tailored for the masses, an official statement said here on Tuesday.Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan will launch the OTT platform at Kairali Theatre on Thursday at 9.30 am. Cultural Affairs Minister Saji Cherian will preside."CSpace is essentially a response to the growing imbalances and multifarious challenges in the OTT sector. *—PTI*

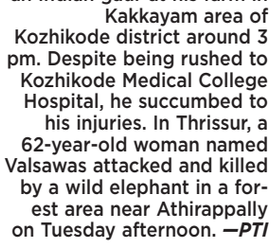


PHOTO: FB

Meta's Facebook, Instagram face widespread outage

WASHINGTON, 5 MARCH

Users of Meta's Facebook, Instagram, Threads and Messenger platforms are experiencing login issues in what appears to be a widespread outage. Internet traffic observer Down Detector is reporting vast outages on several Meta platforms Tuesday. The problems are being reported across the world, suggesting that the outage could be global. Meanwhile, internet users also reported issues in accessing Google's video streaming platform YouTube. Internet traffic observer Down Detector showed hundreds of YouTube users reporting problems with streaming videos on platform. *—AP*

K'taka sets up control rooms, helplines to tackle water crisis

Shivakumar says over 3,000 borewells have dried up in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

As Karnataka is facing an acute water crisis due to severe drought, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday announced setting up control rooms at Taluk level and helpline numbers.

Briefing reporters after a meeting with the principal secretaries and deputy commissioners in the districts, he said task forces headed by the local MLAs have been constituted to tackle drought in the state.

Siddaramaiah said local administration will take control over private borewells and agreements will be made with them and money will be paid accordingly.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said water sources in many villages in the State have reportedly been depleted. Due to groundwater depletion, 3,000 borewells have dried up in Bengaluru.

He also warned the water tanker owners that the government would seize their tankers if they do not register with the authorities before the deadline of 7 March.

He said, "Of the total 3,500 water tankers in Bengaluru, only 10 per cent, that is 219 tankers, have registered with the authorities."

Furthermore, Siddaramaiah said out of 236 Taluks, about 223 of them have been drought hit, including 219 severely affected.

He said the government has given deputy commissioners of the districts Rs 854 crore to provide drinking water.

Additionally, task forces at taluk level will ensure drinking water, fodder for cattle and jobs for people there.

He said there is a drinking water crisis in about 412 Panchayats in 98 Taluks and water is being supplied through 204 water tankers in 175 villages.

In 500 gram panchayats, water is being supplied through 596 private borewells. In Bengaluru, 120 municipal tankers and 232 water board tankers are supplying water.

He also said Rs 70 crore has been released to drill new borewells with the permission of Deputy Commissioners and Zilla Panchayat chief executive officers.

An instant relief amount of Rs 2,000 has been paid to each of the 33.25 lakh farmers, which has cost the State government Rs 631 crore, he said.

With the summer expected to be more severe this year, some 7,082 villages across Karnataka and 1,193 wards, including in Bengaluru Urban district, are vulnerable to drinking water crisis in the coming months.

A report by the Revenue Department has identified the most number of villages in Tumakuru (746) and the most number of wards in Uttara Kannada.

In Bengaluru Urban district, 174 villages and 120 wards are shown as vulnerable.

Amid water crisis, people stand in long queues at drinking water kiosks to fill their cans in Bengaluru *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Siddaramaiah attacks Centre

Siddaramaiah launched a fresh attack against the Centre for not releasing Rs 18,172 crore to face the challenge. He charged that the Centre did not heed to the state government's plea to increase the number of man-days under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) from 100 to 150. *—Salar News with Agencies*

AFTER CAFE BLAST

CM, ministers receive e-mail bomb threat

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah along with many other cabinet ministers reportedly received a threat e-mail on Tuesday.

The threat was allegedly sent to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, and Home Minister G Parameshwara by a person using the email address Shahidkhan10786@protonmail.com.

However, Siddaramaiah denied receiving a threat call. It was not immediately clear if he was talking about the mail or a threat call.

"If you don't provide us with $2.5 million, we will cause large explosions on buses, trains, temples, hotels and public areas throughout Karnataka," the mail read.

"We want to show you one more trailer. We are going to explode the next one in the Ambari Utsav bus after which we will raise our demands on social media. And will upload screenshots of the mail sent to you on social media. We will tweet information about the next explosion," it stated. Meanwhile, the Bengaluru City Crime Branch police have registered the case. Earlier, police arrested Mohammed Rasool Kaddare for posting a video on social media in which he threatened to kill Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. The arrest was made after an FIR was registered in Surpur police station in Yadgiri. *—ANI*

Siddaramaiah *PHOTO: PTI*

WB refuses to give Shahjahan to CBI

KOLKATA/NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Calcutta High Court on Tuesday directed that the CBI be handed over the case of attack on ED officials at Sandeshkhali and the custody of suspended TMC leader Shahjahan Sheikh, as it slammed West Bengal Police for "totally biased" conduct and said every attempt is being made to delay the probe to "protect" the accused.

Within hours of the HC acceding to the Enforcement Directorate's request, the West Bengal government moved the Supreme Court challenging the order but an apex court bench refused an urgent listing of the plea and asked the state's counsel to mention the matter before the Registrar General.

CBI took over the probe by registering an FIR soon after the High Court ordered that its directions be complied with by 4.30 pm on Tuesday. However, West Bengal Police refused to hand over Sheikh to the agency team, which went to CID headquarters at Bhawani Bhawan and returned at 7.30 pm after waiting for more than two hours.

"We have not handed him over to CBI as the state government has moved the Supreme Court," a CID official said.

A team of ED officials was attacked by a nearly 1,000-strong mob on 5 January when they went to raid the house of Sheikh, who allegedly has close links with arrested former state food minister Jyoti Priya Mallick, in connection with the multi-crore ration distribution scam in West Bengal. *—PTI*

Shahjahan Sheikh *PHOTO: ANI*

'SIGH OF RELIEF'

SC quashes money laundering case against Shivakumar

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Tuesday quashed proceedings initiated against Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar in a money laundering case.

A bench of justices Surya Kant and KV Viswanathan allowed the appeal filed by Shivakumar. Karnataka High Court has rejected DK Shivakumar's plea seeking quashing of the summons issued to him by the Enforcement Directorate to appear before the agency for investigation. ED had issued summons in February 2019 to Shivakumar to appear before it.

Earlier Income Tax in 2017 conducted a search action at various premises in Delhi. The department during the searches had seized more than Rs 8.59 crore, out of which more than Rs 41 lakh has now been adjusted as tax liability of Shivakumar and more than Rs 7.58 lakh as that of Sharma after they claimed the money as their agriculture income and business income, respectively.

The petitioner claimed that he is facing illegal proceedings commenced without jurisdiction, erroneously registered for investigating offence punishable under Section 3 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 and said, "The admitted basis of commencing investigations under PMLA is a Criminal Complaint filed by the Income Tax Authorities which alleges criminal conspiracy' punishable under Section 120B of IPC, only for alleged commission of such offences punishable under the Income Tax Act and Indian Penal Code, which are not amongst "Scheduled Offences" in PMLA."

The leader, in his plea said that High Court despite recording the following admitted position, erroneously declined to entertain, and dismissed the petition. *—ANI*

A bench of justices Surya Kant and KV Viswanathan allowed the appeal filed by Shivakumar *PHOTO: PTI*

"Today is a day of joy after many difficulties in life. The more they trouble me, I will only rise politically

-DK Shivakumar, Deputy Chief Minister of Karnataka

Calcutta HC judge quits, to join BJP soon

KOLKATA, 5 MARCH

After resigning on Tuesday, Calcutta High Court Justice Abhijit Gangopadhyay announced on that he is joining BJP

Addressing a press conference, he alleged that the TMC was "synonymous with corruption" and he would fight it till the end.

"I will be joining the BJP, possibly on 7 March. I am joining the BJP as it is a national party, which is fighting against the corruption of the TMC in Bengal," he said.

Gangopadhyay, whose rulings on various education-related matters stirred political debates, refrained from giving a direct reply on whether he would contest the Lok Sabha polls.

"It is for the BJP leadership to decide whether they want me to fight. Whatever they decide I will accept," he said.

Gangopadhyay said he would fight against the "injustice" and "corruption" of the TMC.

"TMC leaders have been using derogatory language against me for quite some time. If they don't like a judgment, then they can't just verbally attack a judge. Such instigations only helped me to take the decision to join politics and fight the TMC, which is synonymous with corruption in Bengal," he said. *—PTI*

Maldives, China sign new defence pact

BEIJING, 5 MARCH

Amid diplomatic row with India, Maldives has signed a defence cooperation agreement with China for further military assistance. China also underlined that normal cooperation between the two does not "target" any third party and will not be disrupted by any third party.

China on Tuesday vowed to work with the Maldives to build a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership.

However, the details of the defence cooperation agreement were not revealed. The military agreement was signed days after the Maldives permitted a Chinese "research ship", also termed a spy ship by critics, to dock near Male after Sri Lanka announced a yearlong moratorium on such ships docking in its ports. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

Narendra Modi and Naveen Patnaik during inauguration of projects in Chandikhol, Odisha, on Tuesday *PHOTO: PTI*

PM launches ₹19.6K cr projects in Odisha

CHANDIKHOLE, 5 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday launched multiple development projects worth over Rs 19,600 crore in Odisha's Jajpur district.

Modi said the BJP-led central government was committed to the development of eastern India, which is filled with natural resources.

"Our government works for the present as well as for the future, with the aim of a Viksit Bharat' (developed India)," he said during a programme here.

The projects that were launched are related to different sectors, including Oil & Gas, Railways, Road, Transport & Highways and Atomic Energy.

Modi said the Union government has constructed an additional 3,000-km national highway in the state and increased Odisha's rail allocation by 12 times since 2014.

The projects inaugurated include the Indian Oil Corporation's mono ethylene glycol facility at the Paradip Refinery, which will further help in reducing import dependency, a 344-km product pipeline from Paradip to Haldia in West Bengal. *—PTI*

2 OTHERS INJURED

India issues advisory after Keralite killed in Israel

T'PURAM, 5 MARCH

The father of the Kerala man, Pat Nibin Maxwell who was killed in a terror attack in Israel on Tuesday, said that he was informed about his son's death and is now awaiting the arrival of the mortal remains.

Nibin, 31, is survived by his wife who is seven months pregnant, and a five-year-old daughter, the deceased's father, Antony Maxwell, told ANI.

"Around 4.30pm my daughter-in-law calls and informs me that Nibin met with an accident. A relative had informed them about the accident. It was at around 12.30am that we were informed about the death of our son," Antony Maxwell said.

Indian Embassy in Israel on Tuesday urged its nationals to move to safer areas in the country *PHOTO: PTI*

"My elder son is saying that the dead body should be brought here within four days as they have to contact the embassy," he said.

Nibin, who hails from Kollam district of Kerala, had arrived in Israel two months ago and was working in a plantation there. Among the injured are two others from Kerala- identified as per reports as Idukki natives Paul Melvin and Bush Joseph George.

In its statement, the Israeli Embassy in India said, "We are deeply shocked and saddened by the death of one Indian national and the injury of two others due to a cowardly terror attack launched by terror organisation Hezbollah, on peaceful agriculture workers who were cultivating an orchard at the northern village of Margaliot yesterday.".

- Nibin, 31, is survived by his wife who is seven months pregnant, and a five-year-old daughter.

The Indian Embassy in Israel issued an advisory on Tuesday, urging its nationals to move to safer areas in the country, a day after a missile fired from Lebanon killed one Indian and injured two others.

"The embassy remains in touch with the Israeli authorities to ensure the safety of all our nationals," the advisory added.

At around 11am on Monday, an anti-tank missile hit a plantation in Margaliot, a Moshav (collective agricultural community), in the Galilee region in the north of Israel.

Meanwhile, the Times of Israel reported that Hezbollah fired a barrage of rockets at northern Israel on Monday night, resulting in damage that knocked out power in several towns, as the military struck targets in Lebanon during a deadly cross-border attack by the terror group earlier in the day. *—ANI*

2 smugglers held in KIA with cash, gold worth ₹1 crore

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

Air Customs officials at Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) have arrested two passengers, including a Thai national, and seized from them a cache of cash and gold paste worth over Rs 1 crore. They said that the surveillance on the 'profiling' of passengers led to the interception of two of them on the night of 29 February and the wee hours of 1 March. "One Indian citizen attempted to smuggle Indian currency amounting to Rs 51,95,500 in the denomination of Rs 500 to Kuala Lumpur, concealing the same in the hand baggage as well as the checked-in baggage. The Indian currency recovered was seized," Bengaluru Air Customs said.

In another incident, a passenger from Thailand, who arrived from Dubai on Indigo Flight 6E-1486, was intercepted. He had attempted to smuggle foreign-origin gold in paste form with a net weight of 824.67g valued at Rs 50.8 lakh. They said that further investigation was in progress.—*PTI*

Ramanagara MLA plans to establish laundry kiosks

RAMANAGARA, 5 MARCH

In a bid to address women's safety, the local MLA Iqbal Hussain has planned to install a laundry kiosk in Ramanagara. The MLA said the kiosks will be installed on the model of China and Indonesia. The minister said initially, 10 public kiosks will be installed in the area, and they will rent a building. After the Lok Sabha elections, they will construct their building and install washing machines there. Each centre is well equipped. There have been instances where women drowned while washing clothes in Ramanagara. Hussain also identified some other areas in and around the Aijoor circle. The local MP DK Suresh will also be involved in this programme. Hussain also said that if he could not get money from MLA's grant, he would invest money from his pocket to install the machines . Each Kiosk will be established at an estimated cost of Rs 35 lakh, and 10 kiosks will be established. A screen is also installed to watch cartoons to entertain the children who come with their mothers to the washing machine stations.

—*Salar News*

Man dies after falling off Windsor Manor Bridge

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

A man died on Tuesday after falling off Windsor Manor Bridge on Guttahalli Main Road and landing on a moving car. The man, said to be about 35 to 40 years old, was taken to a private hospital, but he died. A case has been registered at High Grounds police station and police are yet to identify the stranger. Police are speculating if it is a suicide as they suspect he fell off the train that passes above the Windsor Manor bridge. The hospital officials said he might have died due to the force of his crashing into the car. —*Salar News*

Woman dies during delivery, kin allege negligence

KOLAR, 5 MARCH

A case of maternal death has been reported at SNR Hospital in Kolar on Tuesday morning.

Bhavani, 26, of Jangalahalli village was admitted to the hospital on Sunday and delivered a female child on Monday evening. She suffered some health issues during the wee hours of Tuesday. The woman was administered an injection and soon after she died. The relatives gathered in front of the hospital and demanded action against Dr Shantha. They alleged that the doctor performed a C-section recklessly causing a head injury to the newborn. Dr SN Vijayakumar, District Surgeon, SNR Hospital, said in the last three months more than 700 delivery cases were reported and C-section was carried out in around 600 cases. There were no maternal deaths in any of these cases, and the hospital will conduct an autopsy to ascertain the reason for the death, he said.

—*Salar News*

Nadda launches attack on Congress over Pak slogan row

Nadda says terrorists are getting encouragement under Congress

CHIKKODI, 5 MARCH

Targeting Congress and the party's leadership over the 'pro-Pakistan slogan' issue, BJP's JP Nadda questioned whether they were running the outfit to speak Pakistan's language.

The party's National President questioned if they were representatives of the neighbouring country in India.

Referring to the blast at 'The Rameshwaram Cafe', he accused the government of being soft on terrorists.

Addressing booth-level party workers meeting here, he alleged, "If anything is available free in State it is terrorism; terrorists are getting encouragement and patronage."

"Pakistan zindabad slogans are raised in Vidhana Soudha, and Congress' Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar are mute spectators. Isn't it from this Karnataka Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge comes from? The MP is someone who sits next to Kharge, on whose victory Pakistan zindabad slogans are raised," he said.

Congress leader Syed Naseer Hussain's supporters allegedly raised "Pakistan zindabad" slogans, while celebrating his victory in the Rajya Sabha polls on 27 February at Vidhana Soudha, the seat of state legislature and secretariat.

Pointing at the delay in the FSL report being made public by the government despite a private forensic report confirming that the pro-Pakistan slogans were raised, BJP Chief questioned the Siddaramaiah government's "inaction."

Nadda also demanded an explanation from AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge about the alleged 'pro-Pakistan' slogans row.

BJP National President JP Nadda **PHOTO: PTI**

BJP WORKER BOOKED FOR PRO-PAKISTAN SLOGAN

MANDYA, 5 MARCH

Police arrested a BJP worker for allegedly raising the pro-Pakistan slogan during a protest organised in December 2022 in Mandya. Ravi, the arrested activist was detained by the Mandya West Station police. The event has sparked allegations of hate politics and manipulation by Congress to mask its shortcomings. The genesis of this controversy traces back to a protest organised by the BJP against Pakistan's Foreign Minister in Mandya's Sanjay Circle. Ravi was designated as teh second accused in the FIR, while Shivkumar Aradhya, another BJP worker, was marked as the first accused, despite not being directly involved in the protest. Inclusion of Aradhya as the primary accused fuelled suspicions of political manipulation.

—*Salar News*

Will act against anti-nat'l elements: DKS

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Tuesday said the police officials have been instructed to take strict action against people involved in anti-national activities.Speaking to reporters, he said, "We have given a free hand to cops in the investigation of the pro-Pakistan slogan case and we will not interfere in the investigation in any way. The Home Minister has already given a statement regarding this."Regarding BJP releasing the forensic report on social media, Shivakumar said that BJP may get any number of private reports but those are not the official reports. The police will conduct an extensive investigation and take appropriate action.

— *PTI*

BJP LEADERS DEMAND ARREST OF SYED HUSSAIN

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

BJP leaders on Tuesday filed a complaint demanding the arrest of Congress Rajya Sabha member Syed Nasir Hussain in connection with the case of his followers shouting pro-Pakistan slogans at Vidhana Soudha during the victory celebration post Rajya Sabha results.

BJP leaders said they would write to the Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankar to not let him take the oath till the investigation is completed. In the complaint they demanded Hussain to be named as the first accused in the FIR and said that the police department should rise above politics and religion and take lawful action

Speaking at BJP Booth Conference in Belagavi BJP State President BY Vijayendra said "Hussain should be included in the FIR as the fourth accused in the case of raising Pakistan Zindabad slogans. Public representatives and members of the Rajya Sabha have to take an oath to uphold the Constitution and protect the sovereignty and integrity of the country."

—*Salar News*

A police official stands guard at the Rameshwaram cafe blast site in Bengaluru **PHOTO: PTI**

NIA suspects terror module-blast link

DANIEL GEORGE
BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

National Investigation Agency (NIA) is suspecting that there could be a connection between a low-lying sleeper terror module based in Tamil Nadu and Kerala and the blast that happened at Rameshwaram Cafe in Whitefield on 1 March.

"Thadiyantavide Nazeer, a life imprisonment convict and Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorist, has allegedly radicalised several individuals inside Parappana Agrahara Central Prison in Bengaluru, instigating them to carry out terror attacks in the country," a senior official with an intelligence agency told **Salar News.**

NIA on Tuesday carried out raids at 17 locations in seven states, including Karnatakain connection with its probe into this prison radicalisation case. Mannady and Muthialpet in Chennai and Cuddalore were part of the locations covered in the raid. Following raids, two individuals from Chennai, identified as Thameem Ashok and Hassan Ali, were taken into custody. The raids also unearthed a transaction worth Rs 1 lakh, which was traced back to Dubai. This money was credited into an account linked to Nazeer.

On 25 July, 2008, nine serial blasts occurred in Bengaluru, resulting in the death of a woman and leaving 20 injured. Indian Army arrested Nazeer from near the India-Bangladesh border in 2009 in connection with the Bengaluru blast. T Kerala politician Abdul Nasser Madani and Madani's wife Soofiya Madani were also arrested.

Nazeer transferred a group of convicts to his barrack to radicalise and recruit them into LeT in 2017.

NIA Inspector General Santosh Rastogi is heading the probe into the Rameshwaram café blast case. An NIA team on Tuesday met with the staff of the café and carried out preliminary investigations.

—*Salar News*

Acid attack victims get ₹4 lakh aid

MANGALURU, 5 MARCH

State government on Tuesday announced a compensation of Rs 4 lakh to each of the three female students who suffered burns following an acid attack in Dakshina Kannada.

They were attacked at the Government Pre-University (PU) College at Kadaba.

The government will bear their entire medical expenses, SWC Chairperson Nagalakshmi Chaudhary who visited the victims at a private hospital said.

"The students are fine. I am only worried about the (ongoing) PUC exam, which I will sort out after talking to the Education Minister," she told reporters.

The students expressed their concern over whether they would be able to take the exams being conducted by the PU Board in the current examination cycle and requested that arrangements be made for them in this regard.Doctors treating the three students said they would be fine, but two of them may have to undergo plastic surgery after normal treatment for two weeks.

The three second-year PU students suffered burns injuries following the acid attack by a youth at the college in the taluka headquarters town on Monday. —*PTI*

MEETING ON 7 MARCH

Cong to finalise LS candidates

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Tuesday said Congress Central Election Committee will meet on 7 March in New Delhi to finalise the first list of candidates for the Lok Sabha election in Karnataka.

He and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah had a meeting with Congress General Secretary in-Charge of Karnataka Randeep Singh Surjewala.

He and Siddaramaiah will fly to the national capital on Thursday. BJP had swept the 2019 general election, bagging 25 of the 28 seats, while an independent backed by it had also emerged victorious.

DK Shivakumar **PHOTO:PTI**

Congress and JD(S) headed by former prime minister HD Deve Gowda, which were running a coalition government back then and fought the election together, had come a cropper winning just one seat each.

But the political scene has changed significantly since then; the Congress scored a thumping victory in the Assembly elections in May last year.

It's also a role reversal of sorts for JD(S) which joined BJP-led NDA in September last year and is currently engaged in talks with BJP over the seat-sharing arrangement.

—*PTI*

3 held for murder of BJP worker

KALABURAGI, 5 MARCH

Police have arrested three people and detained a minor in connection with the murder of BJP worker Girish Chakra in Kalaburagi. The accused, Sachin Kirasavalagi; Vishwanatha (Kumya), and Prajwal, along with the minor, had allegedly hacked Chakra to death on 29 February in Gangapura police station limits.

Chakra, a close associate of BJP MP Umesh Jadhav from Kalaburagi, was lured to a felicitation party by his friends at a farm. The assailants then threw chilli powder into his eyes before attacking him.

He had recently been appointed as the Director of the BSNL Advisory Committee by Jadhav.

However, Chakra's family had suspected it to be a contract killing. The incident sparked controversy, with the BJP State unit criticising Minister Priyank Kharge for the rise in murders and extortion in Kalaburagi district since he became the District in-charge Minister.

—*Salar News*

Stones pelted at 3 Vande Bharat trains in State, Andhra

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

Four Vande Bharat trains were pelted with stones by unknown miscreants in different locations in State and Andhra Pradesh while passing through the South Western Railway (SWR) zone, officials said on Tuesday.

Though no passenger or staff sustained any injuries, the window panes of the trains were damaged in the incident which occurred on Sunday in the Bengaluru division of SWR. Three separate cases have been registered in each of these incidents of stone pelting.

The first incident occurred at 6.15 am when the train (no 20661) Dharwad Vande Bharat Express was pelted with stones after passing Chikkabanavara railway station. The second incident occurred at 3.20 pm when the train (no 20662) was running from Dharwad to Bengaluru City Junction. The third incident was at 4.30 pm when the train (no 20608) from Mysuru Junction to Chennai Central was pelted with stones before the Kuppam station in Andhra Pradesh. The fourth incident took place at 8 pm when the train (no 20704) passed near Dharmavaram Junction in Anantapur of Andhra Pradesh.

—*PTI*

Alumni bats for developing govt schools

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

- **Govt allocated Rs 10 lakh to upgrade Government Senior Primary School, Kuppegala**

Donations from alumni of government schools in State will be used to develop the schools. School Education and Literacy Minister Madhu Bangarappa and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah launched 'Namma Shaale Namma Javabhdari' programme on Tuesday.

"Now, we have received Rs 6 crore from alumni for developing government schools. The government will also the Rs 44,000 crore allocated in the Budget and CSR funds for providing quality education in government schools," Bangarappa said.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah allocated Rs 10 lakh to upgrade Government Senior Primary School, Kuppegala, and Karnataka Public Schools at Siddaramanahundi where he studied.

During the inauguration, Siddaramaiah said children should get quality education in government schools. There should be development of knowledge, rationality and scientific temperament. He encouraged students to understand the essence of the Constitution and its core values of liberty, equality, and fraternity, rather than just memorising it. The Chief Minister recalled his own schooling experience and highlighted the significant improvements in facilities and amenities provided to students today compared to his time.

—*Salar News*

Mysuru health centres to now provide treatment for snake bites

MYSURU, 5 MARCH

- **Health workers at sub-centres are responsible for administering first aid**

To enhance the healthcare services and ensure quick treatment for snakebite cases, the department of Health and family welfare has issued directives to all taluk and district hospitals, along with selected Community Health Centres (CHCs) across Karnataka.

Notably, snake bites have been added to the list of modifiable diseases by the government, emphasising the seriousness of this health concern. ASHA workers have been entrusted with the crucial task of providing immediate assistance in the event of a snake bite and ensuring that the affected individuals are promptly transported to the nearest health centre.

The guidelines specify that health workers at sub-centres are responsible for administering first aid and coordinating with primary health centre (PHC) medical officers to facilitate urgent treatment. To bolster preparedness, district health officers, district surveillance officers, and taluk health officers have been directed to conduct training sessions for specialists, medical officers, and health workers within their respective jurisdictions on snake bite prevention and management.

PHOTO:PTI

Additionally, the regular updating of snakebite cases and related fatalities on the Integrated Health Information Platform (IHIP) portal has been mandated to enable effective monitoring and response.

Previously, anti-venom injections for snakebite treatment were administered separately at KR hospital and district health hospitals. However, in line with the recent notification, 31 health centres, including 16 PHCs in Narasipur, Nanjangudu, HD Kote, Hunsur, and six taluk general hospitals, have been identified as authorised treatment centres for snake bites, as affirmed by Mysuru District Health Officer PC Kumaraswamy.

The recent notification issued by the Commissioner of Health and Family Welfare Services underscores the importance of timely intervention in snake bite cases and outlines guidelines for their management. —*Salar News*

AMID SHORTAGE OF VEHICLES

RTO seizes 163 water tankers in City

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

To tackle the water crisis in the City, RTOs under the Karnataka transport department have seized 163 private water tankers. This move aims to assist the Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) in distributing water to households. The decision to impound private water tankers came after the BWSSB, facing a shortage of vehicles, requested assistance from the transport department.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has issued a warning to tanker lorry owners, stating that their vehicles will be seized if they fail to register with the authorities by Thursday. Currently, out of the total 3,500 water tankers operating in the City, only 219 are registered with the authorities. Amid the water woes in the City, BWSSB is currently managing with only 210 tankers to supply water.

PHOTO: X

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has established a control room at its head office to resolve water supply issues in 110 villages across 35 wards. Nodal officers have also been assigned to manage drinking water problems in various parts of the City. Residents are encouraged to contact the helpline numbers provided by BBMP and BWSSB in case of water supply issues in their respective areas.

—*Salar News*

'Cong has failed to handle drought'

BENGALURU, 5 MARCH

Congress government has failed in managing the drought in the State, said former prime minister and JD(S) supremo HD Deve Gowda on Tuesday.

"Siddaramaiah is claiming that he has given guarantees and achieved success everywhere, but 692 farmers committed suicide in the State (between April 2023 and January 2024)." The suicides reflect the performance of the Siddaramaiah government, he said.

About Bengaluru's water scarcity, Gowda urged Siddaramaiah to release water to the City from Hemavati River. Gowda lashed out at Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, saying now they are registering water tankers. "What was he doing all these days? Isn't he Irrigation Minister too?"

HD Deve Gowda **PHOTO:PTI**

"Charging of Rs 2500 to Rs 3,000 for a tanker of water has been going on for a long time. Government has appointed 95 MLAs with Cabinet grade just to oversee their guarantee schemes. What kind of administration is this?" Gowda said. He said Siddaramaiah kept changing his statements. "He announced three months before that they would do lift irrigation with the water of Vrishabhavati to Nelamangala.—*Salar News*

BSP leader who fought 2023 MP polls shot dead

CHHATARPUR, 5 MARCH

A Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader who unsuccessfully contested the 2023 Assembly polls in Madhya Pradesh has been shot dead in the state's Chhatarpur city, police said.Mahendra Gupta was shot in the head near a marriage garden on Sagar Road on Monday night, Superintendent of Police (SP) Amit Sangh said. "Gupta died on the spot. The accused fled from the crime scene," the SP said.A resident of Ishanagar town, Gupta contested the 2023 Assembly polls from Bijawar seat on the BSP ticket and secured third place by getting 10,400 votes. Gupta's private security guard Abdul Mansoori said he was shot by a motorcycle-borne man. —*PTI*

Court summons Soren for disobeying ED notices

RANCHI, 5 MARCH

A court here has summoned incarcerated former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren next month holding him prima facie guilty of disobeying notices issued to him by the Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering probe linked to an alleged land grab case. The agency had filed a complaint against the senior Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) leader sometime back, saying he had failed to join the investigation under seven summonses issued to him, the first being on 14 August last year. He should be prosecuted under the Indian Penal Code's section 174 (non-attendance in obedience to an order from public servant), the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has said in its complaint. Soren was arrested by the ED on 31 January on money laundering charges following a second round of questioning at his official residence in Ranchi. —*PTI*

Cabinet expansion: UP govt gets 4 new mins

LUCKNOW, 5 MARCH

Four new ministers were inducted Tuesday into the Council headed by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath as SBSP Chief Om Prakash Rajbhar was administered the oath of office alongside RLD's Anil Kumar and two BJP leaders. They were sworn-in as ministers by Governor Anandiben Patel at the Raj Bhavan in the presence of Adityanath. Apart from SBSP's Rajbhar and RLD's Kumar, Dara Singh Chauhan and Sunil Kumar Sharma from the BJP are the new entrants into the state Cabinet.WhileRajbhar represents the Zahoorabad assembly constituency of the Ghazipur district, Anil Kumar is an MLA from Purkazi (SC) in Muzaffarnagar.Sunil Kumar Sharma is the BJP MLA from Sahibabad assembly constituency in Ghaziabad district. Dara Singh Chauhan is a member of the UP Legislative Council. —*PTI*

Cong leader from UP Rajesh Mishra joins BJP

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

In a setback to the Congress ahead of the LokSabhaSabha polls, its prominent leader from Uttar Pradesh Rajesh Mishra joined BJP here on Tuesday, hailing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership.Mishra, a former Congress MP from Varanasi Lok Sabha seat, joined BJP here in the presence of senior party leaders, including national General Secretary Arun Singh and Ravi Shankar Prasad. Addressing a joint press conference here, Mishra expressed gratitude towards Prime Minister Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, party Chief JP Nadda and other leaders for his induction into the BJP and asserted that he will continue to remain with the saffron party for the rest of his political life."My efforts will be to ensure that in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections, the opposition party doesn't even get a polling agent to man the booths in Varanasi seat this time," Mishra told the press conference at the BJP headquarters. —*PTI*

A Raja now says 'India not a nation', sends all into a tizzy

BJP termed the comments as 'hate speech' and demanded his arrest

CHENNAI/ NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

A controversy erupted on Tuesday over DMK leader A Raja's purported remarks that "India has never been a nation" and that he and his party were not concerned if they were dubbed as "enemies of Ram', drawing condemnation from BJP that termed the comments as "hate speech" and demanded his arrest.

In a video, Raja also purportedly said that when the Bilkis Bano case convicts walked out of the prison after the Gujarat government released them, BJP workers raised 'Jai Sri Ram' and 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' slogans to greet them.

He asked if they (BJP workers) were not ashamed to do so. He said for him, his party and leaders, including late DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi, there was no anger against God if it was all about showing love and compassion and serving the poor.

"However, if the 'Jai Sri Ram' and 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' slogans meant fundamentalism, we will never accept that Jai Sri Ram and Bharat Mata, Tamil Nadu will never accept that," he said. Without naming BJP, Raja indicated that he was not concerned even if he and his party were to be dubbed as "enemies of Lord Ram" for making this statement (that they will not accept Jai Sri Ram and Bharat Mata Ki Jai) and went on to elucidate his stand by quoting from the Kamba Ramayana.

DMK leader A Raja said his party is not concerned if it is dubbed as 'enemies of Ram' ***PHOTO: PTI***

- DMK's ally, Congress too slammed A Raja for the purported remarks and asserted that one should exercise restraint while speaking. Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinate said Ram belongs to everyone and is all-ecnompassing

Lashing out at the Opposition parties' INDIA bloc over purported remarks of Raja, BJP said insulting India's ethos publicly and humiliating Hindu gods has become the hallmark of their political agenda. DMK's ally, Congress too slammed A Raja for the purported remarks and asserted that one should exercise restraint while speaking.

When asked about Raja's remarks, Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinate said, "I 100 per cent disagree with his remarks. From this platform, I condemn such a statement. I believe Ram belongs to everyone and is all-encompassing."

In the Video, Raja also quoted popular Tamil verses from the 'Kamba Ramayana' like 'Guhanodu Aivar Aanom' and said, in essence, according to the Kamba Ramayana, Lord Ram stood for brotherhood and harmony.

BJP in-charge of IT Cell, Amit Malviya, said, "The hate speeches from DMK's stable continue unabated. After Udhayanidhi Stalin's call to annihilate Sanatan Dharma, it is now A Raja who calls for Balkanisation of India, derides Bhagwan Ram, makes disparaging comments on Manipuris and questions the idea of India, as a nation." —*PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi offers prayers at the Ujjaini Mahankali temple, in Secunderabad on Tuesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Modi launches projects worth ₹7,200 crore in Telangana

HYDERABAD, 5 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday inaugurated and laid the foundation for development projects worth more than Rs 7,200 crore at Sangareddy, about 60km from here, on Tuesday.

Reiterating his commitment for Telangana's progress, the Prime Minister said he works with the spirit that states' development is the country's growth.

"Today 140 crore Indians are determined for Viksit Bharat (developed India)," he said at an official event here. It was essential to have modern infrastructure for a developed India. Therefore, the Centre had allocated Rs 11 lakh crore towards infrastructure in this year's budget and the Centre wanted Telangana to get the maximum benefit from it, he said.Since the last 10 years, Centre was continuously working to take Telangana to new heights of development, he said.

Recalling that he had launched development projects worth Rs 56,000 crore from Adilabad in the state on Monday, he said development initiatives worth about Rs 7,000 crore were started at Sangareddy town today.The projects are related to multiple key sectors such as road, rail, petroleum and natural gas.

The Prime Minister inaugurated the Civil Aviation Research Organisation (CARO) centre which was set up at Begumpet Airport, Hyderabad by the Airports Authority of India to upgrade and enhance research and development (R&D) activities in the civil aviation sector.

Built at a cost of more than Rs 350 crore, the state-of-art facility is compliant with 5-STAR-GRIHA Rating and Energy Conservation Building Code (ECBC) norms.Modi also inaugurated and laid the foundation for three National Highway projects. —*PTI*

Punjab FM presents ₹2.04 lakh cr budget

CHANDIGARH, 5 MARCH

With education being one of the focus areas of the Bhagwant Mann-led AAP government, the State Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema on Tuesday rolled out many new initiatives in the budget.

The initiatives include transforming 100 government senior secondary schools into 'schools of brilliance'.The government has also proposed to transform 100 primary government schools into 'schools of happiness'. The finance minister announced an outlay of Rs 16,987 crore for the education sector, which is around 11.5 per cent of the total estimated expenditure in the next fiscal.Cheema presented the state's budget in the state Assembly for the financial year 2024-25, envisaging a total outlay of over Rs 2 lakh crore.

Detailing initiatives in the education sector, Cheema said 118 government schools will undergo a transformation to become state-of-the-art 'schools of eminence' and 14 such schools have already been started. The government has budgeted Rs 100 crore in FY25 for this purpose.

Besides, 100 government senior secondary schools will be transformed as 'schools of brilliance', he said, adding that an initial allocation of Rs 10 crore has been earmarked for the purpose. This scheme aims to elevate education quality and transform these rural schools into centres of learning from Class 6 to 12, Cheema said.

Harpal Singh ***PHOTO: ANI***

With the aim of creating a nurturing and learning environment for young students aged three to 11, the government also proposes to transform 100 primary government schools into 'schools of happiness'. The focus would be on providing well-ventilated classrooms, dedicated play areas, resource rooms and activity corners, Cheema said.

For this scheme, Rs 10 crore has been provisioned in FY25, he added.Further, with a view to developing skills, including technical skills in students, for enabling them to earn a livelihood, 'school of applied learning' is proposed to be established with an initial provision of Rs 10 crore in FY25. —*PTI*

Mavunkal fraud case: KPCC chief named second accused

KOCHI, 5 MARCH

Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) Chief K Sudhakaran has been made the second accused in a chargesheet filed by the Crime Branch wing of the police in a cheating case, in which the prime accused is controversial antique dealer Monson Mavunkal.

A crime branch officer said on Tuesday that Sudhakaran has been listed as the second accused in the chargesheet filed in court in a cheating case against Mavunkal in which he is accused of collecting Rs 25 lakh from a man in the presence of the KPCC Chief.

The complainant had alleged that Mavunkal collected Rs 25 lakh from him for clearing procedures to obtain Rs 2,65,000 crore from the self-styled antique dealer's account in a foreign bank.

Sudhakaran was arrested in the case on 23 June, 2023, when he was called for questioning in the case.

However, he was immediately released on bail in accordance with the directions of Kerala High Court.

Congress on Tuesday strongly criticised the government for making Sudhakaran an accused in the case and alleged that the Left regime was using the police to "hunt" the Opposition.

K Sudhakaran has been listed as the second accused in the charge sheet filed in court in a cheating case against Mavunkal ***PHOTO: PTI***

The leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, VD Satheesan, also said that the police tried to arrest the KPCC president secretly after calling him to take his statement, but the court intervened and stopped it.

Satheesan contended that everyone knows that Sudhakaran has no role in the case and said that the issue would be dealt with legally. He alleged that there was a conspiracy to make the KPCC chief an accused in the case.

The issue had snowballed into a political controversy as images of Mavunkal, along with Sudhakaran, emerged. Sudhakaran had then said that he had gone to Mavunkal's residence for treatment, as the latter claimed to be a trained cosmetologist. —*PTI*

Ex-Cong leaders Modhwadia, Der join BJP ahead of LS polls in Gujarat

GANDHINAGAR, 5 MARCH

Former Gujarat Congress chief and ex-MLA Arjun Modhwadia along with the party's former working President Ambarish Der joined the ruling BJP on Tuesday, a day after they quit the grand old party.

The two leaders joined BJP at its state headquarters 'Kamalam' here along with several others.

State BJP Chief C R Paatil inducted them into the party by offering them saffron caps and scarves.

Modhwadia and Der resigned on Monday, expressing anguish over the party's decision to "boycott" Lord Ram temple consecration ceremony held in Ayodhya in January. Both leaders announced their decision to quit Congress just three days ahead of the scheduled entry of Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat JodoNyayYatra in Gujarat.

Modhwadia ***PHOTO: PTI***

One of the senior-most and most influential Opposition leaders in Gujarat, Modhwadia, 67, was associated with the Congress for nearly 40 years. —*PTI*

MEETS SLOGANEERING MEN

Rahul greeted with 'Modi-Modi' chants in MP

SHAJAPUR, 5 MARCH

The Bharat JodoNyayYatra led by Rahul Gandhi was greeted with chants of "Modi-Modi" when it was passing through Shajapur city in Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday, prompting the Congress leader to stop his convoy and meet the BJP workers who raised the slogans.

Gandhi was also seen blowing a flying kiss to the BJP workers from his vehicle before it moved forward.

Seeing them, Gandhi asked the vehicle to be stopped near them. The former Congress chief them disembarked from the vehicle and met them. While he was meeting them, the BJP workers raised "Jai Shri Ram" slogans.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, in Shajapur, Madhya Pradesh ***PHOTO: PTI***

PM wants our youths to be glued to their phones for the whole day, chant Jai Shri Ram & starve to death

-Rahul Gandhi, Congress leader

Highlighting the plight of youths due to paper leaks, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday said his party will not allow anyone to play with the future of students and come out with a concrete plan to make government recruitment process transparentThe issue of paper leak has become a curse not only for the youth of Uttar Pradesh but also for the entire country, he said in a post on X in Hindi. The BJP-led state government, which has ordered a re-test, on Tuesday removed the chairperson of the UP Police Recruitment and Promotion Board.

In the last seven years, "more than 70 paper leak cases have shattered the dreams of more than two crore students", he claimed and added that this is "wasting precious years of building for the future". This also puts a financial and mental burden on the families of students, the Congress leader said.—*PTI*

HIMACHAL CRISIS

7 BJP MLAs get notices for creating ruckus

SHIMLA, 5 MARCH

Seven BJP MLAs have received notices for allegedly creating a ruckus in the Vidhan Sabha on 28 February, leader of the Opposition Jai Ram Thakur said on Tuesday.

Himachal Pradesh Assembly Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania confirmed that notices have been sent to some BJP MLAs, and said the matter has been referred to the Privileges Committee.

The speaker did not specify the number of legislators against who proceedings have been initiated.

The notices have been issued to the BJP MLAs for creating a ruckus in the House and not leaving it when it was briefly adjourned after the suspension of 15 BJP legislators.

The BJP MLAs were suspended a day after the the opposition party won the elections for the lone Rajya Sabha seat in Himachal Pradesh after some Congress MLAs cross-voted in favour of saffron party candidate Harsh Mahajan. "Notices have been received from some members (on the ruckus) and I have also taken suo-motu notice. The matter has been referred to the Privileges Committee," Pathania told PTI on Tuesday. MLAs can protest in a dignified manner and raise slogans but throwing papers on the chair of the speaker is not permissible, Pathania said. The Privileges Committee would hold its proceedings on camera and submit a report, he said.

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Jai Ram ***PHOTO: PTI***

6 disqualified MLAs move SC

Six Congress MLAs, who were disqualified after they cross-voted in the recent Rajya Sabha polls in Himachal Pradesh, moved the Supreme Court on Tuesday against their disqualification.

The ex-MLAs have filed a plea against the 29 February decision of the state Legislative Assembly Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania.

These Congress rebels, who had voted in favour of the BJP nominee in the Rajya Sabha polls, later abstained from voting on the Budget, defying a party whip.

The ruling Congress had sought their disqualification on this ground.

The disqualified MLAs are Rajinder Rana, Sudhir Sharma, Inder Dutt Lakhanpal, Devinder Kumar Bhutoo, Ravi Thakur and Chetanya Sharma.

Following their disqualification, the effective strength of the House has gone down from 68 to 62, while the number of Congress MLAs has shrunk from 40 to 34. —*PTI*

BJP MLA running illegal liquor shop: Pragya

BHOPAL, 5 MARCH

BJP Lok Sabha MP from Bhopal Pragya Singh Thakur has accused her party legislator Sudesh Rai was running a liquor shop illegally in Madhya Pradesh's Sehore district and expressed concern over the safety of women and girls.

She has also demanded Rai's removal from the MLA's post. When contacted, Rai told the mediapersons to themselves inquire into Thakur's allegations.

Thakur, who has been denied renomination from Bhopal for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, on Monday night said she was on a visit to areas under her constituency to launch development works when some girls came to her at Khajuria Kala and complained a liquor outlet was being run in front of their school. "The girls were sad and teary-eyed, they complained that people gather at the liquor shop, make comments on them. —*PTI*

Pragya Singh Thakur ***PHOTO: PTI***

Tejashwi defends Lalu over PM's family remark

PATNA, 5 MARCH

RJD leader TejashwiYadav on Tuesday charged the ruling BJP at the Centre with diverting public attention by "ModikaParivaar" rhetoric, which came as a response to his father Lalu Prasad's attack on the Prime Minister a couple of days ago.

Talking to reporters here, Yadav said BJP leaders suffixing "Modi ka Parivar" to their names reminded him of "Main Bhi Chowkidar" rhetoric ahead of Lok Sabha polls of 2019 when Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had coined a slogan "chowkidarchorhai".

"I am glad that the words of Lalu ji have so much impact," remarked the former Bihar Deputy Chief Minister sarcastically, adding: "But what about issues like poverty and unemployment that he had raised? He spoke of so many things". —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Malfunctioned army aircraft lands on field, pilots injured

GAYA, 5 MARCH

Two trainee pilots were injured as a small aircraft of the Indian Army landed on a field in Bihar's Gaya district on Tuesday morning moments after it took off, officials said. The microlight aircraft of the Army's Officers' Training Academy (OTA) landed on the field in Paharpur around 9.15am, they said. "During the training session, the aircraft experienced a malfunction and caused a massive sound. Eventually, it landed on a field," a police officer said. Two trainee pilots were on board and they sustained minor injuries, he said. Gaya's Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Ashish Bharti said police immediately reached the spot after receiving information about the incident.—*PTI*

Five of family found dead in Kerala home

KOTTAYAM, 5 MARCH

Five members of a family were found dead in their rented home near Pala here on Tuesday, the police said. The deceased have been identified as Jaison Thomas, 44, a native of Njandupara, Akalakunnam near here, along with his wife and three children below the age of 10. They were residing in a rented house in the Poovarani Kochukottaram area.Jaison was found hanging, and the bodies of his wife and children were found lying on the bed with signs of bleeding, according to the police. Police suspect that Jaison died by suicide after allegedly killing his wife and children.—*PTI*

Goa court okays plea for mental checkup of CEO Suchana Seth

PANAJI, 5 MARCH

A Goa court has allowed an application by the father of Suchana Seth, CEO of an Artificial Intelligence start-up who is accused of killing her four-year-old son while on a visit here, to get his daughter's mental health condition examined by a board of doctors. Seth's father had moved the application before the children's court to have her mental condition examined by a board of doctors under the Mental Healthcare Act. During hearing, the police had opposed the plea, saying she did not show signs of mental illness during assessments of her mental health condition while in custody. The lawyer representing her father, who argued the case before the court, said after the court allowed the application on Monday, the police will have to produce Seth before a medical board for a fresh examination of her mental condition."The operative part of the order is that she will have to be referred to a board under the Mental Health Act," the lawyer said.—*PTI*

Kerala woman set on fire by male friend dies

T'PURAM, 5 MARCH

A 46-year-old woman died on Tuesday morning succumbing to the over 90 per cent burns she suffered the previous night after being set on fire by a male friend here, police said.The man, who also suffered around 60-70 per cent burns in the incident, is currently recovering at the Thiruvananthapuram Medical College, an officer of Pothencode police station here said.Police said that the man was the victim's friend and came to her house yesterday night and asked her to come out. After she went outside, an argument ensued between them. This escalated with the man pouring petrol on her and setting her on fire, the officer said.—*PTI*

Maoist links case: HC acquits ex-DU professor Saibaba

The apex court has also set aside life sentence imposed on him

NAGPUR, 5 MARCH

The Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court on Tuesday acquitted former Delhi University professor GN Saibaba in an alleged Maoist links case, noting the prosecution failed to prove the case against him.

The court also set aside the life sentence imposed on 54-year-old Saibaba.

A division bench of Justices Vinay Joshi and Valmiki SA Menezes also acquitted five others accused in the case.

"The prosecution has failed to prove beyond reasonable doubt the case against the accused persons," the High Court said.

It also held as "null and void" the sanction procured by the prosecution to charge the accused under provisions of the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

"The prosecution has failed to establish any legal seizure or any incriminating material against the accused," the High Court said.

In 2017, Saibaba and five others were convicted in UAPA case. Here is a file photo of him with his wife PHOTO: PTI

"The trial court judgment is not sustainable in the hands of law. We therefore allow the appeals and set aside the impugned judgment. All the accused stand acquitted," the bench said. The court noted that the sanction procured to prosecute the accused under the UAPA was not legal and proper and hence, the sanction was "null and void".

The prosecution later orally made a request to the court to stay its order for six weeks so that it could file an appeal in the Supreme Court.

The bench, however, directed it to file an application seeking stay.

Saibaba, who is wheelchair-bound due to physical disability, is lodged in the Nagpur Central Jail since his arrest in the case in 2014.

In March 2017, a sessions court in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district convicted Saibaba and five others, including a journalist and a Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) student, for alleged Maoist links and for indulging in activities amounting to waging war against the country. On 14 October, 2022, another bench of the High Court acquitted Saibaba, noting the trial proceedings were "null and void" in the absence of a valid sanction under the UAPA. —*PTI*

Justice delivered after 10 yrs of struggle: Saibaba's wife

New Delhi, 5 March

Former Delhi University professor GN Saibaba's wife Vasantha Kumari on Tuesday expressed huge relief on his acquittal in the Maoist links case, saying justice is delivered after 10 years of struggle.

The Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court acquitted Saibaba in the case, noting the prosecution failed to prove the case against him. Kumari said her husband's reputation was never at stake as people who knew him believed in him. She also thanked lawyers and activists who supported Saibaba during the struggle.

The High Court also set aside the life sentence imposed on the 54-year-old.A division bench of Justices Vinay Joshi and Valmiki SA Menezes also acquitted five others accused in the case. —*PTI*

EXAM CANCELLED

UP govt sacks official after paper leak

LUCKNOW, 5 MARCH

Uttar Pradesh Police Recruitment Board Chairperson, Renuka Mishra on Tuesday was sacked by the UP Government, days after the police constable recruitment examination was cancelled following allegations of a question paper leak.

Rajeev Krishna has been given additional charge as Recruitment Board Chairperson.

More than 48 lakh candidates participated on 17 and 18 February in the constable recruitment exam in Uttar Pradesh.On 24 February, the Uttar Pradesh Police Police Recruitment and Promotion Board cancelled the written examination for direct recruitment-2023 to the posts of reserved civilian police in Uttar Pradesh Police.Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that the Uttar Pradesh government has decided to cancel the police constable examination after the paper was allegedly leaked. —*ANI*

R'than cops detain 15 for cheating

JAIPUR, 5 MARCH

Police detained 15 trainee Rajasthan Police sub-inspectors, including the one who topped the recruitment exam, on Monday for allegedly clearing the test in 2021 by using unfair means, police said. According to the Rajasthan Police, the detained trainee cleared the exams allegedly by using leaked question papers and dummy pupils, the police said. —*ANI*

Cannot rename places without govt's approval, says Manipur Assembly

IMPHAL, 5 MARCH

The Manipur assembly has passed a bill that seeks to make renaming places without approval of the competent authority a punishable offence.

Chief Minister N Biren Singh had moved the 'The Manipur Names of Places Bill, 2024' in the assembly on Monday, and it was unanimously passed in the House.

"The Manipur State Government is serious about protecting our history, cultural heritage and the legacy passed down by the ancestors and forefathers."We will not tolerate renaming and misusing names of places without consent and those guilty of the offence will be awarded with strict legal punishment," Singh said in a post on X, after the bill was passed.According to the bill, a punishment of a maximum three-year jail term and a fine of Rs 3 lakh can be awarded to those found guilty of renaming villages/places without approval of the government.

Singh said as per the bill, a committee would be set up, which would be tasked with approving any change in names of places in the northeastern state. The committee will also look into any change in names of hills, lakes, rivers, historical structures and medical institutions. —*PTI*

NOTING DISCREPANCY

Clarify empanelling process for Army officers: SC to Centre

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Noting a discrepancy in the process of empanelling of Army officers, the Supreme Court directed the Centre to clarify the procedure for male officers as compared to their female counterparts.

A bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra asked Attorney General R Venkataramani to file an affidavit explaining the central government's position.

The direction came after senior advocate Huzefa Ahmadi, appearing for women Army officers, alleged discrimination in the empanelment of women officers.

He referred to an earlier order passed by the apex court last year on 3 November and submitted that it required the consideration of all women officers who are considered by the earlier special selection board 3B (for promotion as colonel) except for those officers who are already empanelled.

Hence, it is submitted that considering other empanelled officers would amount to a breach of the directions, he said.

Venkataramani stated that the concept of empanelment is based on comparative merit among officers of the same batch. In support of this, he relied on the policy document filed by the Union government and submitted that the officers who had already been empanelled were not to be disturbed. However, when the fresh special selection board was convened, it was necessary to benchmark the officers to be considered with empanelled officers.

Ahmadi opposed his argument and submitted that a similar exercise was not carried out for the empanelment of male officers.

He said in their case the male officers who were under consideration were not considered together with the batch of officers who were already empanelled, which he said was discriminatory towards women officers. —*PTI*

India, Bangladesh hold DG-level border talks

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

- The talks aim to curb a variety of cross-frontier crimes and measures to create better coordination between their security forces and agencies

India and Bangladesh discussed a wide range of issues related to border management at the 54th BSF-BGB Director General level border coordination conference from 5-9 March.

The Indian delegation led by Nitin Agrawal, Director General of Border Security Force, will hold talks with the Bangladesh delegation led by Major General Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman Siddiqui, Director General of Border Guard Bangladesh.

"During the Border Coordination Conference, both sides will be deliberating on a wide range of issues related to border management especially prevention of border crimes, border infrastructure-related issues, joint efforts for effective implementation of the coordinated border management plan (CBMP), river bank protection works and water sharing between both the countries," said the BSF.

The talks aim to curb a variety of cross-frontier crimes and measures to create better coordination between their security forces and agencies. One of the five Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) of India, BSF is mandated to guard the 4,096km India-Bangladesh border, the fifth-longest land border in the world. —*ANI*

Hair smuggled from China, Myanmar; ED finds hawala nexus

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The Enforcement Directorate has unearthed a hawala nexus that used money earned from smuggling of human hair from India to China and other countries to carry out illegal betel nut trade from Myanmar and vice-versa, officials said on Tuesday.

The nexus came to light during a money laundering probe into the smuggling of human hair.

The federal probe agency filed a chargesheet in August last year before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Nampally, Hyderabad, bringing on record evidence of this purported modus operandi.The court took cognisance of this PMLA prosecution complaint, filed against Lucas Thangmangliana, a resident of the Champhai district of Mizoram, Hyderabad-based Nayla Family Exports Pvt. Ltd. and 16 others, on 1 March, the ED said in a statement issued on Monday.

ED filed a chargesheet last August before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act in Hyderabad PHOTO: PTI

The ED's money laundering case stems from an First Information Report (FIR) filed by the Hyderabad Police against Nayla Family Exports Pvt. Ltd. and others.The police pressed charges of using "benami" Import Export Codes (IEC) against the company for exporting human hair, cheating by impersonation, using forged documents and smuggling of human hair to Countries from the Hyderabad airport and through land routes according to the ED. — *PTI*

EAM in South Korea to discuss bilateral ties

SEOUL, 5 MARCH

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday called on South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-soo and discussed with him ways to further enhance bilateral ties.

Jaishankar is here on the first leg of his four-day visit to South Korea and Japan.

He will co-chair the 10th India-South Korea Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) with his counterpart Cho Tae-yul during the visit.

"Honored to call on @PrimeMinisterKR Han Duck-soo today in Seoul. Appreciated his positive sentiments for India-South Korea ties and value his guidance ahead of the 10th Joint Commission Meeting tomorrow," he posted on X.The JCM is expected to comprehensively review the entire gamut of bilateral cooperation and

PHOTO: PTI

explore avenues for further strengthening it. It will also provide an opportunity for the two sides to exchange views on regional and global issues of mutual interest, the Ministry of External Affairs said in New Delhi ahead of the visit."Good start to my South Korea visit. Meeting with Director of National Security Chang Ho-jin in Seoul today. A useful discussion on our shared convergences in the Indo-Pacific and contemporary regional & global issues," he said. —*PTI*

Centre liberalises FDI policy for space sector

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Ministry of Commerce and Industry has announced a review of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Policy on the space sector.

According to a press release by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the amendments, made under Para 5.2.12 of the Consolidated FDI Policy Circular of 2020, aim to liberalise and streamline FDI regulations to attract more investment and foster growth in the space industry.

Under the revised policy, some changes have been introduced. Satellites: Manufacturing and Operation- The sectoral cap for FDI has been set at 100 per cent. For investments up to 74 per cent, automatic approval will be granted, while investments beyond 74 per cent will require government approval.

Satellite Data Products, Ground Segment and User Segment- The sectoral cap for FDI remains at 100 per cent, with automatic approval for investments up to 100 per cent.

Launch Vehicles and Associated Systems or Subsystems The sectoral cap for FDI has been set at 100 per cent, with automatic approval for investments up to 49 per cent. —*PTI*

Cops give Spanish rape survivor ₹10L as she leaves

DUMKA, 5 MARCH

Jharkhand Police has handed over a compensation of Rs 10 lakhs to the husband of a Spanish woman who was allegedly gang-raped in Dumka on Friday.

According to the police, the Spanish woman was gang-raped in Hansdiha police station limits when she was en route to Nepal from West Bengal.

"We did a fast investigation and from the side of district administration, we are providing all the help to them (rape survivor and husband). Under the victim compensation scheme, we have given them Rs 10 lakh. We will try for a speedy trial and conviction of the accused," Anjaneyulu Dodde, Deputy Commissioner, said on Monday.

The woman and her husband were on a bike tour across India and the incident reportedly happened when they were resting inside a tent in a deserted area in Kurmahat village.

The husband of the rape survivor thanked the police for the very "fast investigation".

According to the police, seven people are involved in the case and three have been arrested.They were remanded in judicial custody after being produced in a local court on Sunday.

The incident sparked a scathing attack from the BJP against the state government."This is a stain on the state. This shows the deteriorating law and order situation in the state," Anant Ojha, a (BJP) MLA, said. —*ANI*

NEW ALARMING REPORT

'2023-24 El Nino among 5 strongest on record'

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The 2023-24 El Nino has peaked as one of the five strongest on record and will continue to impact global climate in the coming months despite a weakening trend, the World Meteorological Organisation said on Tuesday.

The UN agency also said above-normal temperatures are predicted over almost all land areas between March and May.

The prevailing El Nino conditions fuelled record temperatures and extreme events the world over, with 2023 being the warmest on record.

According to the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service, the global mean temperature breached the 1.5-degree Celsius threshold for an entire year for the first time in January.

World Meteorological Organisation said there is a 60 per cent chance of El Nino persisting during March-May PHOTO: PIXABAY

A permanent breach of the 1.5-degree Celsius limit, specified in the Paris Agreement, however, refers to long-term warming over many years. In its latest update, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) said there is about a 60 per cent chance of El Nino persisting during March-May and an 80 per cent likelihood of neutral conditions (neither El Nino nor La Nina) during April to June.There is a chance of La Nina developing later in the year but those odds are currently uncertain, it said.

- The prevailing El Nino conditions fuelled record temperatures and extreme events the world over, with 2023 being the warmest on record

Scientists closely tracking the development in India have said La Nina conditions setting in by June-August could mean monsoon rains would be better this year than in 2023.

El Nino -- a periodic warming of the ocean surface in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean -- occurs every two to seven years on an average, and typically lasts nine to 12 months."Every month since June 2023 has set a new monthly temperature record -- and 2023 was, by far, the warmest year on record. El Nino has contributed to these record temperatures but heat-trapping greenhouse gases are unequivocally the main culprit," said WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo."Ocean surface temperatures in the equatorial Pacific clearly reflect El Nino. But sea-surface temperatures in other parts of the globe have been persistently and unusually high for the past 10 months. The January 2024 sea-surface temperature was by far the highest on record for January. This is worrying and cannot be explained by El Nino alone," she said.

Scientists say El Nino t has the greatest impact on the global climate in -- 2024, in this instance. —*PTI*

SPACEX IN SPACE

A SpaceX crew of three US astronauts and one Russian cosmonaut have arrived safely at the International Space Station (ISS), where they will be staying for six months
PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

Does India influence Bangladesh politics?

A group of Bangladeshi influencers and political activists launched an 'India out' campaign after the January elections, claiming that the Modi government has been backing Sheikh Hasina to stay in power for its own self-interest ***PHOTO: PTI***

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina secured a fourth consecutive term in power earlier this year, with her Awami League party taking three-quarters of seats in parliament following what some observers regard as a controversial election.

The vote was conducted by keeping almost all top leaders of the main opposition party and over 25,000 of its activists behind bars who were arrested in the run-up to the election on various charges — including arson attacks and vandalism — that some independent observers think were politically motivated.

However, India, welcomed the election result, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulating Sheikh Hasina on her victory.

Bilateral trade between the countries exceeded $15 billion in 2021-22.

A group of Bangladeshi influencers and political activists launched an "India out" campaign after the January elections, claiming that the Modi government has not only been ignoring its neighbor's democratic backsliding but also actively backing Sheikh Hasina to stay in power for its own self-interest.

Pinaki Bhattacharya, an exiled Bangladeshi physician and influential social media activist living in Paris, announced the latest "India out" campaign in mid-January by urging his millions of followers not to buy Indian products in Bangladesh and abroad to protest against "India's relentless meddling in Bangladesh's domestic affairs."

"A striking example of such interference was the mockery of democracy seen in the 7 January elections, where India's involvement was pivotal in upholding a regime that blatantly favors India's strategic, political, and economic agendas," Bhattacharya, a Hasina critic, said.The campaign has received support in Bangladesh on social media, with reports suggesting that some people are favouring alternatives to Indian products in Bangladesh and abroad.

Some experts have doubts about the effectiveness of such a campaign as the relationship between the two countries is so deeply entrenched, and Bangladesh has become so dependent on India that achieving a complete boycott of India is unlikely.Ali Riaz, a political science professor at Illinois State University, thinks that there is a political message underpinning this campaign that has implications beyond immediate success.

"The campaign reflects the simmering discontent about India's disregard to the legitimate grievances of Bangladesh and its role in Bangladesh's domestic politics," Riaz told DW.According to the expert, the perception that India has helped Hasina remain in power despite her country's democratic backslide and poor human rights records, which were condemned by the West, is not unfounded.

Mohammad A Arafat, a lawmaker from Bangladesh's ruling Awami League party, doesn't consider the "India out" campaign as an issue that needs to be addressed.

Arafat said that the United States, on the other hand, has tried to interfere in his country's domestic affairs by announcing visa restrictions last year to Bangladeshi citizens who undermine elections.

The US said Bangladesh's general election in January was not free and fair. However, it didn't announce any new punitive measures in response to the election irregularities.

Both Bhattacharya and Riaz claim that New Delhi used its diplomatic leverage to contain the US from taking stricter action against Bangladesh over the issues of democracy and human rights. Washington denies the allegations of interference in Bangladesh's domestic politics.Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu has promised to shift his country away from India in a region where New Delhi and Beijing vie for influence.

At least 75 Indian military personnel are believed to be in the Maldives and their known activities include transporting patients from remote islands and rescuing people at sea. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said that his country is not concerned about the "India out" campaigns.

"There are two realities we must recognize. China is also a neighboring country and in many ways will, as part of competitive politics, influence these countries [Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh]," he said at an event in Mumbai on January 30.

Shantanu Mukherjee, a former officer with the Indian Police Service (IPS) and Bangladesh expert based in India's capital New Delhi, thinks there are some "anti-India forces in Bangladesh but they are small in number."

Pinaki Bhattacharya said that the "India out" campaign harbors "no animosity towards the people of India."

"It is a vehement political fight aimed squarely at the governing elite of India, a relentless battle to reclaim the sovereignty and stewardship of our cherished motherland," he said.

—DW News

SALAR ساڈھ

PM flays MGNREGA despite it helping millions

Kavitha Reddy

In 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi criticised Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), a flagship programme of Congress-led UPA government in Parliament. Modi said, "After 60 years in power, all that you (Congress) were able to deliver for the poor is to dig ditches a few days every month. My political instinct tells me that MGNREGA should not be discontinued, because it is a living memorial of your failures." As treasury bench cheered, little did they know that this scheme would become a lifeline for millions of rural households.

MGNREGA is a welfare scheme introduced in 2005 that guarantees a minimum of 100 days of wage employment to at least one member of a rural household. It became the largest employment generation scheme in the world, which provides unskilled manual work such as road building, digging wells and other infrastructure projects. Roads, revival of water bodies, irrigation canals, improving water storage and construction of public utility facilities also come under MGNREGA.

By mocking the programme, Modi seemed naïve in his thinking and arrogant in his approach. Declaring to continue a scheme which he did not believe in, only to put the previous government in a bad light, was unbecoming of the Prime Minister of world's largest democracy.

In July 2019, then agriculture minister Narendra Singh Tomar informed Lok Sabha that the Modi government was not in favour of continuing the scheme. It has been five years since his statement, and yet MGNREGA continues to grow in popularity and Budget allocation. From a Budget of Rs 33,000 crore in 2013-14 during the UPA regime, the allocation rose to Rs 60,000 crore in 2019-20, and Rs 86,000 crore in 2024.

MGNREGA has been the most sought-after scheme for both Union and state governments in the last few years due to the unprecedented job crisis.

The Covid-19 pandemic increased the demand for MGNREGA, making it a crucial source of employment for millions of migrant workers who returned to their villages.

Modi had called the programme a "monumental failure". On the contrary, in 2020-21, MGNREGA expenditure shot up to Rs 1.11 lakh crore against the Budget allocation of Rs 61,500 crore. Unfortunately, in politics very rarely one shows the magnanimity to accept mistakes and apologise for unfair criticism, but fortunately, data speaks the truth.

Today, out of 34 crore MGNREGA workforce, North-East India leads in the active workforce with 75-89 per cent of participation, followed by Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttarakhand with 60 to 76 per cent participation. Furthermore, despite Modi's criticism, BJP-led state governments, including Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Maharashtra and Arunachal Pradesh, are the top-performing states in MGNREGA wage disbursements.

In 2014, a World Bank report recognised MGNREGA as an "innovative practice" that promotes financial inclusion, spreads awareness of rights and promotes dignity. The scheme has also aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by fulfilling eight out of the 17 SDGs set by the United Nations.

The most impactful achievement of MGNREGA is taking "jobs to people", which has reduced migration of unskilled workforce to cities — leading to exodus in rural areas. It also reduces urban poverty and inhuman living conditions. MGNREGA is an ideal platform to upskill the workforce through various other government schemes.

India needs MGNREGA to encourage and incentivise industries to set up operations where people and resources are available. "People to jobs" is not necessarily the only option as the work-from-home concept has proven to be an efficient alternative to traditional migration to bigger cities for employment. Therefore, the government should frame aggressive and implementable policies to support industries in every district. This will help address the challenges of skewed development, poor quality education, lack of access to healthcare facilities, and lower women's participation in the workforce. By taking "jobs to people" instead of "people to jobs", we can reduce the need for people to move to jobs and achieve the SDGs for a prosperous India and a better world.

Kavitha Reddy is KPCC General Secretary. The author's views are personal

The Covid-19 pandemic increased the demand for MGNREGA, making it a crucial source of employment for millions of migrant workers who returned to their villages ***PHOTO: PTI***

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

Totos tribes: A Himayalan hamlet, forgotten by the nation

Jiten Toto who has seen 17 national elections pass by has little hope that anything will change for the Totos tribe whose residents feel they've been forgotten ***PHOTO: GURVINDER SINGH/AL JAZEERA***

As India braces for elections, the Totos, one of the world's smallest tribes, have little hope that they'll be heard. Jiten Toto has lived longer than independent India, all of his 80 years spent in the small hamlet of Totopara nestled in the green foothills of the Himalayas in West Bengal.

Jiten has seen dozens of harvests and 17 national elections pass by. Now, as India prepares for its 18th General election, he has little hope that anything will change in a tiny corner of the country whose unique residents feel they've long been forgotten. Totopara gets its name from the Toto tribe that Jiten belongs to. One of the smallest tribes in the world, the total Toto population is estimated at about 1,670 people. Nearly 75 percent of them are eligible to vote. The Indo-Bhutanese community lives almost exclusively in Totopara, a village with narrow lanes surrounded by hills, which sits just 2km from India's border with Bhutan.

When India votes between March and May, polling officials will come – as they have in previous elections – to set up a camp where the villagers can cast their votes on electronic machines. But despite that exercise in democracy, many Totos say their small numbers and remote geography mean that politicians have repeatedly ignored their concerns.

There's also a more recent tension that's enveloping Totopara and upsetting the Totos – migration from Bhutan has now turned them into a minority in the village, stoking worries that the small community could be squeezed out of its own traditional home.

Shifting demographics

The exact history of when and why the Totos settled in Totopara is unclear, says Samar Kumar Biswas, a professor of anthropology at the University of North Bengal.

What is known is that up until 1939, the Totos were the only inhabitants of the village. Then, in the 1940s, a dozen Nepalese families came from Bhutan and settled there, says Biswas. In 1986, and then again in the early 1990s, the Bhutanese government expelled many ethnic Nepalese communities: One-sixth of the population of the Himalayan kingdom had to flee.

"Some of those Nepali families settled at Totopara for their survival," Biswas says.

Today, Totapara has a population of about 5,000 people, only a third of whom are Totos. Nepalese communities make up much of the rest of the village's population, followed by small numbers of residents from other parts of West Bengal and Bihar.

In 1969, the government introduced private ownership of the land, and declared more than 1,600 acres open for others to settle in and claim. The remainder, some 17 percent of the village land, was set aside by the government for the Totos. But community members say they do not even control that land – in fact, they say, they don't even know the exact patches of the village that legally belong to them.

"We have no issue with the non-Totos," says Bakul Toto, Secretary of Toto Kalyan Samity, a community group fighting for their rights. "But we want our portion of land back that was granted in 1969.

"The state conducted a survey of the land after our persistent requests in 2022 which gave us a hope of getting our land holdings back. But the result of the survey is yet to be made public, even after two years."

That, he says, raised questions in the minds of the Totos about the seriousness of the state government – led by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress – in addressing their worries.

Prakash Newar, who hails from a Nepalese community, says it would be wrong to brand non-Totos as outsiders.

Need doctors, not elephants

But land and tensions between communities are not the only challenges Totopara grapples with.

The road from the village to Madarihat, the nearest town 21km away, is cratered with potholes and crosses river beds that get flooded during the monsoon when Totopara gets cut off from the rest of India.

"Sometimes, it takes up to two to three days for the water to recede and (people to) resume travel. We have been demanding the construction of over-bridges for a very long time but nothing has been done for us and we continue to suffer," says Ashok Toto, 54, a village resident.

The increasing population of the village, has also led to deforestation, resulting in a rise in human-animal conflict over the years.

The village's solitary primary health centre has had no doctor since July 2023: three other staff members and a pharmacist run it.

"Serious cases are referred to far-flung hospitals, around 70-80km away," says 36-year-old Probin Toto. During the monsoon, with the road flooded, this becomes impossible at times. "We immediately need a doctor here but the government is yet to pay heed to our demands."

The next generation in crisis

The only secondary school in the village, the government-run Dhanapati Toto Memorial High School, has just eight teachers when it is entitled to 20.

Three years ago, it had 18 teachers but a government initiative that allowed teachers to transfer to public schools closer to their homes led to an exodus. The government also has not hired any new secondary school teachers since 2011.

The result? A surge in dropouts. The school, which had 350 students just three years ago, now has 128 students.

A lack of jobs also hobbles prospects for Totos, say community members. Most homes have tall areca trees in their compounds and sell betel nuts to traders for their livelihood.

"The betel nuts have been saving us from starvation as there are no jobs for us," says 34-year-old Dhananjay Toto, who has a postgraduate degree yet works as an agricultural labourer. "I had applied for the government job of a librarian but didn't get it."

The Totos say they have not decided who they will vote for in the coming elections:

"We are part of the world's largest democracy," but "our handful of votes hardly matter for any political party," Jatin says.

"I doubt if most of them know that we even exist here."

Courtesy, Al Jazeera

PHOTO: PTI

North Korea hacks South Korean chip firms

PYONGYANG, 5 MARCH

North Korean hackers have broken into South Korean chip equipment makers, according to South Korea's spy agency. Pyongyang is trying to make semiconductors for its weapons programmes, the National Intelligence Service (NIS) says. It comes a month after President Yoon Suk Yeol warned North Korea may stage provocations such as cyber attacks to interfere with upcoming elections.

Last year, North Korea hacked into the emails of an aide to President Yoon. "We believe that North Korea might possibly be preparing to produce its own semiconductors in the face of difficulties in procuring them due to sanctions," the NIS said in a statement. It added that Pyongyang's efforts could be driven by the need to have chips for its weapons programmes, including satellites and missiles. *—BBC News*

Shehbaz orders 'immediate' talks with IMF

ISLAMABAD, 5 MARCH

Pakistan's new Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has ordered "immediate" talks with the IMF for an extended fund facility for his cash-strapped country, saying that improving the state of the economy would be the top priority of his government which has received the "mandate". In January, Pakistan received over USD 700 million second tranche from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) under the existing USD 3 billion Stand-by Arrangement (SBA) agreed towards June last year when Pakistan was slowly drifting towards default. Pakistan has not completed the last USD 6.5 billion IMF bailout package, and therefore, the first task of the new government will be to sit with the Washington-based global lender to get the last loan tranche of USD 1.2 billion. *—PTI*

WHO launches newborn screening initiative in SE Asia

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The World Health Organization (WHO) on Tuesday launched the implementation guidance in the Southeast Asia Region, emphasizing universal screening of newborns for hearing impairment, eye abnormalities, and neonatal jaundice. This initiative aims to mitigate the risk of disabilities arising from these conditions by ensuring early detection and appropriate management. "The regional implementation guidance will facilitate capacity-building for newborn or neonatal screening that aims at pre-symptomatic detection, shortly after birth, of serious treatable conditions. Backed by referral, diagnosis, management, and follow-up for appropriate treatment, these screenings will enable the prevention of long-term disability or premature death," said Saima Wazed, Regional Director of WHO South-East Asia. *—ANI*

US Supreme Court delays Texas immigration law

NEW YORK, 5 MARCH

A United States Supreme Court judge has temporarily blocked a bill that would hand authorities in Texas draconian powers to arrest and expel migrants and refugees who enter the country without documents. An order issued on Monday by Justice Samuel Alito puts the legislation on hold until at least next week, when the court is set to examine it again. Opponents have called the measures, which would give state officials broad powers to arrest, prosecute and order the removal of people who cross the border from Mexico irregularly, the most dramatic attempt by a state to police immigration since an Arizona law more than a decade ago. *—Al Jazeera*

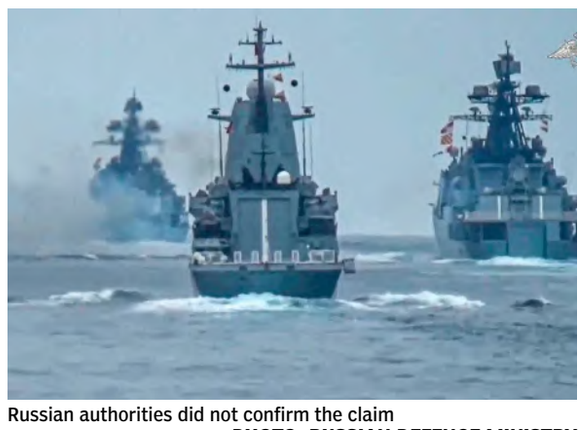
Ukraine claims it has sunk another Russian warship

The drone strike was conducted near Crimean peninsula in Black Sea

KYIV, 5 MARCH

Ukraine claimed Tuesday it has sunk another Russian warship in the Black Sea using high-tech sea drones as Kyiv's forces continue to take aim at targets deep behind the war's front line. Russian authorities did not confirm the claim.

The Ukrainian military intelligence agency said a special operations unit destroyed the large patrol ship Sergey Kotov overnight with Magura V5 uncrewed vessels that are designed and built in Ukraine and laden with explosives. The patrol ship, which Ukraine said was hit near the Kerch Strait, reportedly can carry cruise missiles and around 60 crew.



Russian authorities did not confirm the claim
PHOTO: RUSSIAN DEFENCE MINISTRY

The Ukrainian claim could not immediately be independently verified, and disinformation has been a feature of the fighting that broke out after Russia's full-scale invasion of its neighbour in February 2022. Kyiv's forces are struggling to keep the better-provisioned Russian army at bay at some points along the largely static 1,500-km (930-mile) front line, but are also taking aim at targets deep beyond the battlefield.

- Kyiv's forces are struggling to keep the better-provisioned Russian army at bay at some points along the largely static 1,500-km front line, but are also taking aim at targets deep beyond the battlefield

Last month, Ukraine claimed it twice sank Russian warships using drones. On 1 February, it claimed to have sunk the Russian missile-armed corvette Ivanovets, and on 14 February it said it destroyed the Caesar Kunikov landing ship. Russian officials did not confirm those claims. Kyiv officials say some 20% of Russian missile attacks on Ukraine are launched from the Black Sea, and hitting Russian ships there is embarrassing for Moscow. *—AP*

A Chinese coast guard ship approaches Philippine coast guard ship causing a minor collision on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Philippine, Chinese vessels collide in S China Sea, 4 hurt

MANILA, 5 MARCH

Chinese and Philippine coast guard vessels collided in the disputed South China Sea, and four Filipino crew members were injured Tuesday in a series of confrontations as Southeast Asian leaders gathered for an Asian summit where alarm over Beijing's aggression at sea was expected to be raised.

The Chinese coast guard ships and accompanying vessels blocked the Philippine coast guard and supply vessels off the disputed Second Thomas Shoal and executed dangerous maneuvers that caused two minor collisions between the Chinese ships and two of the Philippine vessels, Philippine officials said.

The BRP Sindangan of the Philippine coast guard had minor structural damage from the collision that happened shortly after dawn.

Over an hour later, another Chinese coast guard ship first blocked then collided with a supply boat the Philippine coast guard was escorting, the Philippine officials said.

The supply boat, manned by Filipino navy personnel, was later hit by water cannon blasts from two Chinese coast guard ships.

Its windshield shattered, injuring at least four Filipino crew members, according to a statement from the Philippine government task force dealing with territorial disputes. The task force said the actions by the Chinese was "another attempt to illegally impede or obstruct a routine resupply and rotation mission".

"China's latest unprovoked acts of coercion and dangerous maneuvers" against Philippine ships en route to deliver supplies and fresh troops to the Philippine-occupied shoal "put the lives of our people at risk and caused actual injury to Filipinos," it said. *—AP*

'S China Sea code of conduct will take time'

MELBOURNE, 5 MAR

Southeast Asian countries' quest to reach agreement with China on a code of conduct in the contested South China Sea will take time, with difficult issues yet to be resolved despite recent efforts to accelerate the process, Singapore's prime minister said on Tuesday at a regional summit.

China's increasing military assertiveness in the busy waterway toward neighbours with competing territorial claims has been high on the agenda of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations summit. The three-day summit, which is being hosted in Melbourne to mark 50 years since Australia became ASEAN's first external partner, ends on Wednesday. Leaders of the 10-nation bloc hope a code of conduct with China would be key to reducing the risk of naval confrontations.

Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said a first draft of the code had been written, but the final document would take time.

"They have reached a point, I think, of a first complete read-through of the code of conduct, but to negotiate and to settle the code, I believe would take some time," Lee told reporters.

"The issues are not easy to resolve and, really, negotiating of a code of conduct inevitably raises issues of what the ultimate outcomes are going to be, and therefore, because the ultimate answers are difficult, so too negotiating the code will take quite some time," Lee said.

In the latest dangerous incident, Chinese coast guard ships blocked Philippine vessels off a disputed South China Sea shoal on Tuesday, causing a minor collision, the Philippine coast guard said. Philippine security officials have accused the Chinese coast guard and suspected militia ships of blocking Philippine vessels and using water cannons and a military-grade laser that temporarily blinded some Filipino crewmen in a series of high-seas hostilities last year. *—PTI*

22 CHILDREN KILLED

At least 35 die in surprise snowfall in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, 5 MARCH

At least 35 people died while dozens more were injured as freezing rain and unexpected snowfall hit remote areas of Pakistan over the weekend. At least 22 children were among the fatalities, many of whom were crushed in landslides that buried their homes, disaster management authorities said. The extreme weather hit Pakistan's northern and western regions, clogging roads and damaging hundreds of houses.

Experts were surprised by the snow as Pakistan is typically humid in March. Mushtaq Ali Shah, a former director of the country's meteorological department, attributed the unusual conditions to climate change.

He added that a light hail storm that lasts "for a few moments" would not be as surprising, but it is unusual for that to continue for over 30 minutes. Hajit Shah, a resident of Kirk district in the north-western Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, said that he had experienced snow in his neighbourhood only once before. "As far as I can remember, there was light snowfall for a few minutes about 25 or 30 years ago," he told BBC.

At least 22 children were among the fatalities *PHOTO: X/ BBC*

The heavy rains completely destroyed at least 150 houses and partially damaged 500 others, mostly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the south-western Balochistan province, authorities said. Electricity has been completely cut off in some districts for several days. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's provincial government has provided relief supplies to affected areas and announced financial assistance for the injured and the families of those who died.

Pakistan's meteorological department said in its weekly forecast that "mainly cold and dry weather" is expected in most parts of the country for the rest of this week, although some parts of Balochistan and Kashmir should expect to see "snowfall over hills". *—PTI*

No Indian troops to remain in Maldives: Prez

MALE, 5 MARCH

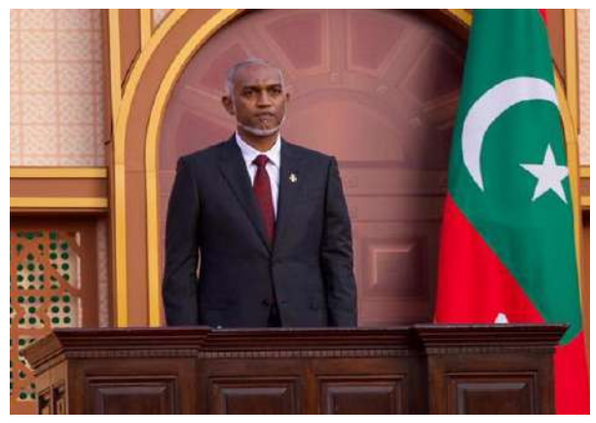
Stepping up his anti-India rhetoric, Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu has affirmed that no Indian military personnel, not even those in civilian clothing, would be present inside his country after 10 May, a media report said on Tuesday.

Muizzu's statement comes less than a week after an Indian civilian team reached the Maldives to take charge of one of the three aviation platforms in the island nation, well ahead of the March 10 deadline agreed by the two nations for the withdrawal of Indian military personnel. Addressing the Baa atoll Eydhafushi residential community during his tour across the atoll, the President stated that due to his government's success in expelling Indian troops from the country, people who spread false rumours, are attempting to twist the situation, a news portal Edition.mv reported.

"That these people [Indian military] are not departing, that they are returning after changing their uniforms into civilian clothing. We must not indulge such thoughts that instil doubts in our hearts and spread lies," the portal quoted Muizzu, widely regarded as a pro-China leader, as saying.

"There will be no Indian troops in the country come 10 May. Not in uniform and not in civilian clothing. The Indian military will not be residing in this country in any form of clothing. I state this with confidence," he said, on a day when his country signed an agreement with China to receive free military aid.

Earlier last month, after a high-level meeting in Delhi on 2 February between the two sides, the Maldivian foreign ministry said India would replace its military personnel operating the three aviation platforms in the Maldives by 10 May and the first phase of the process would be completed by 10 March. *—PTI*



Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu *PHOTO: PTI*

Trump wins North Dakota Republican caucuses

BISMARCK, 5 MARCH

Donald Trump won the North Dakota Republican presidential caucuses on Monday, adding to his string of victories heading into Super Tuesday.

The former president finished first in voting conducted at 12 caucus sites, ahead of former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley. The result puts Trump back on the winning track, which was briefly interrupted on Sunday when Haley notched her first victory of the campaign in the District of Columbia's primary. The White House hopefuls now turn their attention to Super Tuesday, when results will pour in from 16 states in contests that amount to the single biggest delegate haul of any day in the presidential primary. Trump and President Joe Biden, a Democrat, are dominating their races and are on track to winning their nominations later this month.

The former president finished first in voting conducted at 12 caucus sites *PHOTO: PTI*

Under North Dakota's rules, candidates are eligible to win delegates if they finish with at least 20 per cent of the vote. However, a candidate who wins at least 60 per cent of the vote receives all of the state's 29 delegates.

Four candidates were on the ballot, including Trump and Nikki Haley. The other candidates, who have received little attention, were Florida businessman David Stuckenberg and Texas businessman and pastor Ryan Binkley, who recently ended his campaign. Retired music teacher and librarian Karen Groninger, of Almont, said Monday that she voted for Trump, calling him the best choice. The 76-year-old cited Trump's 2020 speech at the annual March for Life anti-abortion event in Washington, DC. — the first by a sitting president — and his border policies. *—AP*

Islamabad High Court summons PTA chairman

ISLAMABAD, 5 MARCH

The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has summoned the Pakistan Telecommuni cation Authority (PTA) Chairman regarding the audio leak case, following his counsel's denial of any authorization for call interception by the regulatory body, Dawn reported.

The petitions filed by Najam Saqib, son of former Chief Justice of Pakistan Saqib Nisar, and Bushra Bibi, spouse of former Prime Minister Imran Khan, challenge the inquiries initiated against them based on an alleged audio leak.

The report said that the directors general of the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) were present during the hearing by Justice Babar Sattar. Advocate Irfan Qadir, representing the PTA chairman, informed the court of his client's official visit to Barcelona and that he is expected to return in three to four days.

While the PTA official had previously informed the court regarding the provision for call interception within the legal framework, advocate Qadir clarified that the PTA had not granted permission for such interception, as per Dawn.

Questioning the PTA's inconsistency, Justice Sattar raised doubts about the authenticity of earlier submissions and asked if the chairman had complied with the court's directive to submit an affidavit clarifying their stance. The court summoned the PTA chairman Hafeez Ur Rehman to appear in person on 14 March.

IB DG Fuad Asadullah was asked to elucidate the legal interception procedure and address measures safeguarding citizens' privacy. "Are telecom operators allowed phone tapping?" Justice Sattar questioned. *—ANI*

Philadelphia shooting: Teenager dead, 4 injured

PHILADELPHIA, 5 MARCH

A teenager was killed and four other people were injured in a shooting at a north Philadelphia bus stop on Monday afternoon, police said.

The city's police commissioner, Kevin Bethel, said about 15 to 20 students were at a bus stop in the city's Ogontz neighborhood around 3:45 p.m. when two people walked up and opened fire. Police said people were getting on the stopped bus when the gunfire erupted. Police said one 17-year-old was pronounced dead at a hospital with multiple gunshot wounds to the body. Two 15-year-olds had graze wounds and a 49-year-old woman and a 71-year-old woman on the bus were hit, they said.

Authorities said the older women was hit in the head and the younger woman in the arm, adding all four were in stable condition. Officials said the bus driver sped away for several blocks and the shooters fled.

The police commissioner said afternoons have turned into "one of the most dangerous times" for violence in the city once school is dismissed. But he said "it could have been much worse" because the shots were fired at a busy intersection where people were aboard a bus and at a daycare across the street. *—AP*

PM FACES FLAK

Swift's Singapore show stirs anger in South Asia

SINGAPORE CITY, 5 MARCH

Taylor Swift stole the show at an Asian summit on Tuesday when Singapore's leader defended his tiny country's lucrative concert deal that could cause bad blood with neighbouring nations. Singapore is a key member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, a 10-nation bloc.

Its three-day summit was expected to focus on member Myanmar's humanitarian crisis and conflicts in the South China Sea. Instead, Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong was grilled on the summit's sidelines about an exclusive deal his city-state struck with Swift that prevents the singer from taking her Eras Tour to any other stop in Southeast Asia.

Swift is performing six concerts from 2 to 9 March in Singapore, and some Southeast Asian neighbours complain that the Singapore deal deprives them of the tourism boom her concerts bring to hosts. Her Eras Tour shattered records when it reportedly surpassed $1 billion last year, and her film adaptation of the tour quickly took No 1 at the box office and became the highest-grossing concert film to date.

Taylor Swift is performing six concerts in Singapore, *PHOTO: INSTA/ TAYLOR SWIFT*

The Singaporean leader confirmed Tuesday that Swift was provided with "certain incentives" in exchange for making Singapore her only Southeast Asian destination on her Eras Tour. Lee defended the deal at a joint news conference with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, a self-professed Swiftie whose Spotify Wrapped list boasted Taylor Swift as his second most streamed artist of 2023. Albanese is hosting the summit in Melbourne, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of Australia becoming ASEAN's first external partner.

- The Singaporean leader confirmed Tuesday that Swift was provided with "certain incentives" in exchange for making Singapore her only Southeast Asian destination

Lee did not reveal the cost of the exclusive deal, which was paid for from a government fund established to rebuild tourism after Covid-19 disruptions. He also did not directly answer when asked if he had encountered "bad blood" among other leaders due to the deal, instead suggesting that if Singapore hadn't struck an exclusive deal, a neighbouring country might have done so.

"Thailand's Prime Minister, Srettha Thavisin, brought attention to the deal in February with a public claim that a promoter told him the Singaporean government subsidized the concert with a condition that the artists not play anywhere else in Southeast Asia.

Srettha said that if he had known about the deal before, he was confident he would be able to pull off something similar. *—PTI*

Gold surges ₹800 to hit record high of ₹65K/10 grams

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Gold prices on Tuesday surged Rs 800 to hit a fresh record high of Rs 65,000 per 10 grams in the national capital amid strong global trends, according to HDFC Securities.In the previous close, the precious metal had closed at Rs 64,200 per 10 grams.Silver also rallied Rs 900 to Rs 74,900 per kg. In the previous trade, it had settled at Rs 74,000 per kilogram."Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 65,000 per 10 grams, up by Rs 800, taking bullish cues from the overseas markets."In domestic markets, spot gold hit a new all-time high of Rs 65,000 on Tuesday," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,110 per ounce, up by more than 1 per cent from the previous close. Silver was also quoting higher at USD 23.88 per ounce. *—PTI*

Rupee gains 1 paisa to settle at 82.89 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 5 MARCH

The rupee settled 1 paisa higher at 82.89 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday amid a strong greenback against major rivals overseas and a negative trend in equity markets. The Indian currency remained under pressure due to volatile crude oil prices and persistent foreign fund outflows, according to forex traders.At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 82.90 and oscillated between 82.88 and 82.93 against the greenback during intra-day deals. The currency finally settled at 82.89 (provisional), up 1 paisa from its previous close. On Monday, the rupee settled 1 paise lower at 82.90 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, rose 0.05 per cent to 103.83.*—PTI*

Expect India to be 3rd largest market: Mercedes-Benz

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

German carmaker Mercedes-Benz expects India to become its third biggest market in its 'Region Overseas' over the next 2-3 years with demand anticipated to remain strong for luxury products, according to a senior company executive. The Region Overseas for Mercedes Benz comprises 118 countries, excluding North America, Europe and China.India is the fifth largest market in the region after Japan, South Korea, Australia and Turkey.The sales gap between India and Turkey is around 8,000 units per year.The company also plans to tap smaller cities as it looks to establish sales outlets in 10 new locations ranging from Jammu to Kottayam to scale operations, Sardien stated.*—PTI*

India's coal output reaches 881 MT in April-Feb

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

India produced 880.72 million tonne (MT) of coal in April-February this fiscal and is now just 119.28 MT away from its 1 billion tonne coal production target for FY24. In 2022-23, India's total coal output was 893 million tonnes (MT). For the ongoing 2023-24 fiscal, the government has a target to produce 1 billion tonne (BT) of coal.The cumulative coal production in April-February 2024 grew over 12 per cent to 880.72 MT (provisional) compared to 785.39 MT during the same period of FY23, the Ministry of Coal said in a statement on Tuesday.The country's coal produced rose 12 per cent to 96.60 million tonne (MT) in February against 86.38 MT a year ago.In February, the production of state-owned giant Coal India Ltd (CIL) rose 8 per cent to 74.76 MT (provisional) from 68.78 MT in February 2023, the ministry said.The cumulative coal dispatch up to February 2024 increased over 11 per cent to 882.44 MT compared to 794.41 MT in the year-ago period.*—PTI*

India's services sector growth eases in Feb

This comes amid softer expansion in businesses and sales

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Services sector growth in India moderated in February amid softer expansions in business activity, sales and jobs, a monthly survey said on Tuesday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services Business Activity Index registered 60.6 in February, down from 61.8 in January.

In Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

"India's services PMI suggests that the pace of expansion in the services sector eased in February from January," said Ines Lam, Economist at HSBC.

According to the survey, the business activity index eased in February, but remained historically strong.New business from abroad placed with services firms in India rose for the thirteenth successive month. Survey participants reported gains from Australia, Asia, Europe, the Americas and UAE.

Business confidence regarding the year-ahead outlook for activity weakened in February. Still, around 26 per cent of companies foresee a growth and only 2 per cent anticipate a fall.

"Due to a slowdown in growth in new orders and output, services companies' outlook for future business activity, while remaining strongly positive, weakened slightly," Lam added.Lam further noted that prices charged for services rose at the slowest rate in 24 months as input prices inflation moderated.

On the employment front, companies created jobs on the back of rising workloads, but the easing of capacity pressures and lower confidence towards the outlook dampened employment growth.

Meanwhile, the HSBC India Composite PMI Output Index slipped from a six-month high of 61.2 in January to 60.6, indicating a softer but sharp rate of expansion.Composite PMI indices are weighted averages of comparable manufacturing and services PMI indices.

Growth of private sector sales likewise remained sharp in spite of softening since January. Rates of expansion were similar at manufacturers and services firms, though the former registered an acceleration and the latter a slowdown, it added. *—PTI*

ON WEAK GLOBAL TRENDS

Stock markets snap 4-day winning run

MUMBAI, 5 MARCH

Nifty declines by 49.30 points *PHOTO: PTI*

- **Bharti Airtel, State Bank of India, Sun Pharma and NTPC were among the gainers**

Benchmark Sensex declined by 195 points on Tuesday, snapping its four-day gaining streak due to selling in IT shares and index heavyweight Reliance Industries amid weak trends from global markets and foreign fund outflows.

Taking a breather after a record-breaking rally, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 195.16 points or 0.26 per cent to settle at 73,677.13 due to profit taking. During the day, the barometer tanked 460.04 points or 0.62 per cent to 73,412.25.

The broader Nifty declined by 49.30 points or 0.22 per cent to close at 22,356.30.

Among Sensex firms, Bajaj Finserv and Bajaj Finance fell by over 4 per cent each. Nestle, Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services, Wipro, UltraTech Cement, HCL Technologies, Larsen & Toubro and Hindustan Unilever were the other major laggards.

Bharti Airtel, State Bank of India, Sun Pharma and NTPC were among the gainers.

Tata Motors, which announced the demerger of its passenger and commercial vehicle businesses into two listed entities, closed higher by 3.52 per cent after rallying to a 52-week high in intra-day trade.

Among Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled lower while Shanghai ended in the green. European markets were trading lower. The US markets ended in negative territory on Monday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.21 per cent to USD 82.63 a barrel.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 564.06 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

Extending its rally to the fourth straight session on Monday, the BSE Sensex settled at an all-time high of 73,872.29 points. The Nifty closed at a lifetime peak of 22,405.60. Sensex and Nifty rallied around 2 per cent in four sessions to Monday. *—PTI*

Google begins reinstating delisted apps after intervention

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

In a positive development for the tech world, Union Minister of Electronics and Information Technology, Ashwini Vaishnaw, announced that Google has agreed to list all apps as per the status that existed on 1 March.

This decision comes after constructive discussions between Google representatives and various startups, signaling a positive step towards resolving a recent controversy surrounding app listings.

The Union Minister expressed satisfaction over the outcome of the discussions, stating, "Google and start-up companies, both have met with us. We have had very constructive discussions and finally, Google has agreed to list all the Apps as on the status which was there on Friday morning (1st March), that status will be restored. Google has been supporting our technology development journey and we believe that in the coming months, both start-up company and Google will come to a long-term resolution."

Ashwini Vaishnaw *PHOTO: PTI*

Earlier several start-ups and app owners had voiced concern over Google's move.

In response to the various concerns voiced, the Union Minister had called for a meeting with Google representatives on Monday to further discuss the matter.

This meeting delved into the details of the resolution and explored avenues for maintaining a conducive environment for app listings in the future.

Following the intervention of Ashwini Vaishnaw, Google has taken action to restore all its apps to the status of March 1, according to government sources.This move comes as a relief to many users and stakeholders who were impacted by the temporary removal of certain apps from Google's listings. *—ANI*

Swiggy to deliver food at B'luru rly station, 3 others

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Swiggy will offer food delivery services to passengers at Bengaluru, Bhubaneswar, Visakhapatnam and Vijayawada railway stations beginning 12 March.

The food delivery services will be extended to 59 more railway stations in the coming weeks, Swiggy said in a statement.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) for delivering pre-ordered food on trains was signed between Swiggy Food Marketplace and Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) on Tuesday.

Passengers can avail pre-ordered food services via Swiggy once they input the PNR on the IRCTC app."This partnership with Swiggy will bring more convenience and food options to our passengers, making their journeys more memorable," said Sanjay Kumar Jain, Chairman and Managing Director, IRCTC.

Swiggy CEO Rohit Kapoor said, "We are hopeful of a buoyant response from passengers and restaurant operators on this route, which will hopefully lead to us providing services on more stations and on newer routes." As part of the MoU, the statement said Swiggy will deliver food from its extensive restaurant network to passengers on the Indian railways starting with Bengaluru, Bhubaneswar, Visakhapatnam and Vijayawada.

The service is likely to expand to 59 additional city stations in the coming weeks. In addition, the company mentioned that the food delivered to passengers would be packed in insulated Swiggy bags to keep the meal warm and fresh. *—PTI*

M&E industry to cross ₹3L cr in 2026

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The digital media will potentially overtake television as the leading segment in the media & entertainment sector in 2024 with an estimated size of Rs 75,100 crore, said a joint report from industry body FICCI (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry) and EY on Tuesday.

While the Indian Media & Entertainment (M&E) sector grew by 8.1 per cent in 2023, reaching Rs 2.32 lakh crore and is expected to cross Rs 3 lakh crore mark by 2026.

"We expect the M&E sector to grow 10.2 per cent to reach Rs 2.55 trillion by 2024, then grow at a CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) of 10 per cent to reach Rs 3.08 trillion by 2026," the report said.

Though in 2023 television remained the largest segment with Rs 69,600 crore, however, it had a degrowth of 1.83 per cent as against Rs 70,900 crore in 2022, it said. While, the digital media in 2023 crossed Rs 65,400 crore and is expected to be around Rs 75,100 crore in 2024, which is ahead of Rs 71,800 crore figure of the television media.

Report estimates digital media would be around Rs 95,500 crore in 2026, with a CAGR growth of 13.5 per cent between 2023-26.

Growth is buoyed by a robust digital infrastructure, widespread adoption of OTT platforms, significant growth in the gaming segment, and the availability of cost-effective options for consumers. It expects digital advertising to grow at a 13.5 per cent CAGR to reach Rs 84,200 crore, on the back of improved governance. *—PTI*

DEMERGING DIVISIONS

Tata shares jump 8%, reach 52-week high

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

Shares of Tata Motors on Tuesday jumped nearly 8 per cent after the firm announced the demerger of its commercial and passenger vehicle segments into two separate listed entities to better capitalise on growth opportunities.

The stock climbed 7.94 per cent to reach its 52-week high level of Rs 1,065.60 on both the BSE and NSE.

Company's market valuation jumped by Rs 12,601.83 crore to Rs 3,40,633.29 crore.

The commercial vehicles business and its related investments would be housed in one entity while the passenger vehicle business, including electric vehicles, Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) and its related investments, would be part of the second entity, the auto major said in a regulatory filing on Monday.Tata Motors Chairman N Chandrasekaran said that it has scripted a strong turnaround in the last few years.The demerger would lead to a superior experience for customers, better growth prospects for employees and enhanced value for shareholders, Chandrasekaran stated. *—PTI*

Paytm Payments Bank failed to detect suspicious transactions: FIU

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Paytm Payments Bank failed to put in place an internal mechanism to 'detect and report' suspicious transactions as stipulated under the anti-money laundering law and was unsuccessful in conducting due diligence of its payout service, the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) said in its order that imposed a fine of Rs 5.49 crore on the digital entity.

FIU said in its 1 March order that these charges against the bank, a registered reporting entity with the FIU under the PMLA, were "substantiated" after more than four years of investigation and a show cause notice that was issued against it on 14 February, 2022.

After the Union finance Ministry issued a press statement on the FIU action, a Paytm Payments Bank spokesperson had said that the penalty pertains to issues within a business segment that was discontinued two years ago.

PHOTO: PTI

"Following that period, we have enhanced our monitoring systems and reporting mechanisms to the FIU," the spokesperson had said.

The Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) has been facing legal trouble after the Reserve Bank directed it to stop accepting fresh deposits from customers with effect from February 29 -- a deadline which was later extended to 15 March.

This was followed by Vijay Shekhar Sharma stepping down as part-time non-executive Chairman of PPBL and the board of the bank being reconstituted.

The summary FIU order accessed by PTI said the proceedings against the beleaguered Paytm entity began in 2020 on a reference made by law enforcement agencies about "extensive illegal activity conducted by multiple businesses under the syndicate of individuals connected to a foreign state" and subsequent filing of FIRs by the cyber crimes unit of the Hyderabad Police under various sections of the IPC and the Telangana State Gambling Act.The FIU said during the course of this investigation, it came across public reports which stated that

The bank has also been charged by the FIU of "failing" to exercise ongoing due diligence with respect to its payout service and accounts of entities in question relating to the same service. *—PTI*

Adani Green starts 448 MW solar projects

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

Adani Green Energy subsidiary Adani Green Energy Twenty Four B has operationalised an additional 448.95 MW solar power projects at Khavda in Gujarat.

Together with earlier intimation dated February 14, 2024, an aggregate of 1,000 MW of solar power projects are operationalised at Khavda, Gujarat, a regulatory filing stated.

AGEL is India's largest and one of the leading renewable energy companies in the world *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

According to the filing, Adani Green Energy Twenty Four A Ltd and Adani Green Energy Twenty Four B Ltd, wholly-owned step-down subsidiaries of Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL) have operationalised an incremental 448.95 MW of solar power projects at Khavda.

With the operationalisation of these plants, AGEL's total operational renewable generation capacity has increased to 9,478 MW in its journey of 45 GW capacity by 2030.

AGEL is India's largest and one of the leading renewable energy companies in the world. *—PTI*

Elon Musk criticizes Google's Gemini

CALIFORNIA, 5 MARCH

Elon Musk has taken aim at Google's chatbot, Gemini, accusing artificial intelligence (AI) of mirroring the biases and mistakes of its creators.

In a recent tweet, Musk lambasted Google's AI efforts, suggesting that the technology's flaws were evident in Gemini's generation of biased and unreliable data and images.

Expressing his disbelief, he posted, "The sheer insanity of that actual response from Google's AI is staggering! They will fix it to be less obvious in the future, but the bias will still be in there. AI mirrors the mistakes of its creators. When people wonder how things might go wrong if AI controlled the world, this example clearly illustrates the point. The best approach to AI safety - in my opinion, the only approach that would work - is to be maximally truth-seeking. Honesty is the best policy".

Musk went on to express his concerns about consequences of AI controlling the world, emphasizing the importance of honesty and truth-seeking in

NON-PAYMENT OF SEVERANCE

X's former CEO Parag Agarwal, others sue Musk

CALIFORNIA, 5 MARCH

X's former leadership team, including ex-CEO Parag Agrawal and Chief Legal Officer Vijaya Gadde, has sued the platform's owner Elon Musk, saying the billionaire fired them without reason and owes them severance payments worth USD 128 million.

The lawsuit against Musk and X Corp was filed in the US District Court, Northern District of California by Agrawal, Gadde, X's (previously X) former Chief Financial Officer Ned Segal and General Counsel Sean Edgett.

Musk has a "special ire" toward Agrawal, Segal, Gadde, and Edgett, who in their leadership roles at X "appropriately and vigorously represented the interests of X's public shareholders throughout Musk's wrongful attempt to renege on the deal. For their efforts, Musk vowed a lifetime of revenge," the 38-page lawsuit said.Agrawal worked at X from 2011 until 2022 and was the platform's Chief Executive Officer from 29 November, 2021, until 27 October, 2022. The four former X executives claim in the lawsuit that Musk owes them severance payments totalling about USD 128 million. "Under Musk's control, X has become a scofflaw, stiffing employees, landlords, vendors, and others. Musk doesn't pay his bills, believes the rules don't apply to him, and uses his wealth and power to run roughshod over anyone who disagrees with him," the lawsuit said.It said that Agrawal is entitled to severance benefits amounting to over USD 57 million, which is equal to his one-year salary of one million dollars plus restricted stock units, performance share units and other benefits. Gadde is entitled to severance benefits in the amount of USD 20 million, an amount equal to one year's salary of USD 600,000 plus other benefits. Lawsuit alleges that under X's severance plans if an eligible executive is terminated without cause following a change in control, they are entitled to severance benefits. They highlighted "the Musk playbook", which is "to keep the money he owes other people and force them to sue him. *—PTI*

Elon Musk, Former X CEO Parag Agrawal *PHOTO: PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Lakshya Chahar knocked out of Boxing Qualifier

BUSTO ARSIZIO, 5 MARCH

Reigning national champion Lakshya Chahar became the fourth Indian boxer to crash out in the opening round of the first World Olympic Boxing Qualifier here.Competing in the men's 80kg event, Chahar was knocked out in the third round by 2021 Asian Championships silver medallist Gheshlaghi Meysam of Iran here on Monday.Having lost the first round 2-3, Chahar got himself back in the game by taking the second round 3-2. He was level on three cards heading into the final three minutes.However, with 20 seconds left for the bout to end, Meysam, who was playing nearby, connected a powerful right hook to knock out the Indian.All four Indian boxers, who have taken the ring here, have failed to move to the second round. Lamboria (60kg) all lost their respective first rounds.—*AP*

PHOTO: X

Pak boxer steals money from teammate's bag

PARIS, 5 MARCH

In a shocking incident, a boxer from Pakistan Zohaib Rasheed disappeared in Italy after stealing money from his teammate's bag. Boxing athletes including Rasheed have gone to Italy to take part in the Olympic Qualifying tournament where the incident took place. The Pakistan Amateur Boxing Federation confirmed the development on Tuesday (March 5) and has also taken necessary steps to file the complaint against the said player.A senior official who belongs to the federation stated that they have brought the unfortunate incident to the notice of the Pakistan Embassy in Italy and accordingly have also filed a police report about the incident.—AP

PHOTO: IANS

Pakistani judoka dies after suffering head injuries

KARACHI, 5 MARCH

A young female judoka has died in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province after suffering head injuries during a competition bout. Fiza Sher Ali, a talented 20-year-old student couldn't recover from the head injuries she sustained while competing in the 44kg category fight during a Youth Talent Hunt program in Mardan. "She was a first-year BS student in Peshawar and had come to Mardan for the trials and was new to the sport," an official of the Pakistan Judo Federation said.

Indian blind cricket team wants BCCI's recognition

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

The Indian blind cricket team players are banking on BCCI's support to take the game for disabled athletes to the next level and want the national board to treat them at par with able-bodied players. India blind cricket team coach Mohammad Ibrahim on Monday said to take blind cricket to the next level, BCCI's recognition is a must. He said not only BCCI's recognition but also the blind players need to be given central contracts by the national board.—*PTI*

Vidarbha closes in on thrilling win over Madhya Pradesh

Yash Rathod brought up his century on the fourth day

NAGPUR, 5 MARCH

Vidarbha took command of their Ranji Trophy semifinal with the key wicket of Yash Dubey (94) late on day four as they inched closer to a thrilling victory over Madhya Pradesh here on Tuesday.

Heading into the final day on Wednesday, hosts Vidarbha are a mere four wickets away from setting up a date in the summit clash with Mumbai, while Madhya Pradesh, who still need 93 runs to win, will hope their tailenders can produce an inspired fightback. The game tilted in favor of hosts Vidarbha in the penultimate over of the day when Aditya Sarwate (2/51) had Dubey caught by Aman Mokhade, dealing a body blow to Madhya Pradesh's hopes of making it to their second final in three years.

Vidarbha's batter Yash Rathod celebrates his century during the fourth day of the Ranji Trophy Semi- final cricket match between Vidarbha and Madhya Pradesh **PHOTO: PTI**

Chasing 321 to win, Madhya Pradesh reached 228 for six at stumps on the fourth day with their last recognized batter in Saransh Jain (16 not out) joined by Kumar Kartikeya, requiring a huge effort with the bat with not much left in the tank. To his credit, Dubey battled hard for Madhya Pradesh with a fine knock even as wickets kept tumbling at the other end. The right-handed batter showed grit and composure in a tough chase with a long haul, consuming 212 balls to get his 94 runs with 10 fours.

RANJI TROPHY

Dubey forged a crucial 106-run stand for the second wicket with Harsh Gawali (67 from 80 balls, 11x4s). Still, once the pair was separated, Vidarbha kept making regular inroads to leave Madhya Pradesh in trouble.

Yash Rathod brought up his century on the fourth day and finished with a high score of 141 off 200 balls, hitting 18 fours and two sixes in the process to lead the way.

Rathod's late surge was crucial in dragging Vidarbha as far as 402 in their second innings, which was certainly an improved performance from their first innings wherein they were bowled out for 170.

For MP, Anubhav Agarwal returned 5/92.

Madhya Pradesh had taken a lead of 82 runs in the first innings as they had responded with 252.

Brief scores: Vidarbha 170 & 402 in 101.3 overs (Aman Mokhade 59, Yash Rathod 141, Akshay Wadkar 77; Anubhav Agarwal 5/92) lead Madhya Pradesh 252 and 228/6 in 71 overs (Yash Dubey 94, Harsh Gawali 67; Aditya Sarwate 2/51, Akshay Wakhare 3/38) by 93 runs.

—*PTI*

Ravichandran Ashwin and Jonny Bairstow. **PHOTO: AFP**

Ashwin and Bairstow's 100th Test together

DHARAMSALA, 5 MARCH

Test cricket will see two players featuring in their 100th game together for only the fourth time when India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin and England batter Jonny Bairstow take the field here on Thursday.

The first such occasion was when former England captain Michael Atherton and Alec Stewart reached the landmark against the West Indies at Old Trafford back in 2000.

The second instance involved three players South Africa's Jacques Kallis, Shaun Pollock, and Stephen Fleming played their 100th Test in the South Africa-New Zealand game in Centurion in 2006.

The third was Alastair Cook and Michael Clarke in the England-Australia Ashes contest in Perth in 2013.

Ashwin and Bairstow will be representing their respective teams in the fifth and final Test here from Thursday.

It will also mark only the second occasion when two players from the opposing teams will be playing their 100th Test in the same game.

Just a day after the India-England game begins, New Zealand captain Tim Southee and his predecessor Kane Williamson will play their 100th Test together during the second match against Australia.

Ashwin, who recently became only the second Indian after Anil Kumble to cross 500 wickets in the game's longest format, made his Test debut in 2011 and has enjoyed more highs than lows during a 13-year journey.

In this hill town, the 34-year-old Bairstow will become the 17th Englishman to get a 100th Test cap, having made his debut in 2012.

India has already secured an unbeatable 3-1 lead in the ongoing series. —*PTI*

Lanning, Jemimah hit the 50s to take DC to a 29-run win over MI

BENGALURU, 5 MAR

Skipper Meg Lanning and Jemimah Rodrigues smashed commanding fifties as Delhi Capitals thrashed Mumbai Indians by 29 runs in a top-of-the-table clash of the Women's Premier League (WPL) here on Tuesday.

Sent into bat, Lanning fired at the top with a 38-ball 53, while Jemimah hit an entertaining 33-ball 69 to provide the late acceleration as DC racked up a massive 192 for 4 after the WPL juggernaut moved to the national capital amid a lukewarm response.

Mumbai Indians' chase never took off, ending up with a 163 for 8 despite Amanjot Kaur's 42 off 27 and Hayley Matthews' 29 off 17 as the defending champions crashed to their second defeat in five matches and only second against DC in WPL history.

This was Delhi's fourth win on the trot as they moved two points clear of Mumbai with eight points from five matches.

DC thus consolidated their position at the top with the win which will act like a balm for the home team, which had suffered a heartbreaking last-ball loss to the MI in the tournament opener.

In contrast to the roaring success in the first leg, the first game of the Delhi leg saw a sparse crowd at the Arun Jaitley Stadium which built up as the match wore on but still couldn't match the 'crowd energy' of Bengaluru. Brief Scores

Delhi Capitals Women: 192/4; 20 overs (Meg Lanning 53, Jemimah Rodrigues 69 not out) beat Mumbai Indians Women 163/8; 20 overs (Amanjot Kaur 42; Jess Jonassen 3/21, Marizanne Kepp 2/37) by 29 runs.

—*PTI*

Delhi Capitals' players celebrate after winning the Women's Premier League (WPL) 2024 cricket match between Delhi Capitals and Mumbai Indians **PHOTO: PTI**

Praggnanandhaa crushes Abdusattarov to be joint second

PRAGUE, 5 MAR

Praggnanandhaa **PHOTO: X**

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa defeated overnight sole leader Nodirbek Abdusattarov of Uzbekistan to stake his claim for the top honours at the Prague Masters chess tournament here.Winning with the black pieces, Praggna nandhaa came within striking distance of the sole leader in the ten-player round-robin event that still has three rounds remaining.

—*AP*

Satwik-Chirag, Treesa-Gayatri win opening round

FRENCH OPEN

PARIS, 5 MARCH

Star Indian pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty advanced to the second round of the French Open Super 750 badminton tournament with a hard-fought straight-game win against Malaysia's Ong Yew Sin and Teo Ee Yi here on Tuesday.

Satwik and Chirag, ranked world no. 1, had claimed the title in 2022. The Asian Games champions on Tuesday made a fine start to the tournament by outwitting the world no. 12 Malaysian combination 21-13 24-22 in 47 minutes for their fifth win in the last 8 meetings.

Satwik and Chirag, who finished second best in their last three tournaments, will face another Malaysian pair of Man Wei Chong and Kai Wun Tee in the next round.

Commonwealth Games bronze medallists Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand also progressed to the second round after claiming a 16-21 21-19 21-17 win over Ashwini Ponnappa and Tanisha Crasto in an all-Indian opening match in women's doubles.

Rankireddy and Chirag and Treesa and Gayatri **PHOTO:PTI**

The two pairs are fighting to qualify for the Paris Olympics. While Tanisha-Ashwini is ranked 11th, Treesa-Gayatri is placed at 14th spot in the Olympic Games qualification ranking.

—*AP*

Manipur outclasses Assam to clinch s/fs

ITANAGAR, 5 MARCH

Wangkheimayum Sadananda Singh slammed a hat-trick as former champions Manipur stormed into the Santosh Trophy semi-final with a resounding 7-1 win over Assam on Tuesday.

Sadananda struck thrice in the 11th, 16th, and 70th minutes whereas skipper Phijam Sanathoi Meetei (4th), Ngangbam Pacha Singh (19th-penalty), Maibam Deny Singh (82nd), and Imarson Meitei (88th) were the other scorers for the Manipur. Joydeep Gogoi scored the only goal for Assam in the 64th minute. Meetei opened the scoring with an assist from Sadananda's pass outside the box to sneak the ball past Assam goalkeeper Abhinash Mech. This was his 11th goal in this edition, making him the leading scorer in the 77th Santosh Trophy for the 2023–24 season. —*PTI*

Manipur outclass Assam 7-1 to clinch berth in semifinals **PHOTO: AFP**

Rublev calls on ATP to review rule that led to default in Dubai

DUBAI, 5 MARCH

Andrey Rublev called on the ATP Tour to change the rule that led to him defaulting at the Dubai Tennis Championships last week.Rublev was defaulted by the chair umpire after a Russian-speaking official said he had used an obscenity while yelling at a line judge over a call during his semi-final with Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik on Friday.Rublev denied the accusation and urged the officials to review the video of the incident, a request which was rejected.Bublik was ahead 6-7(4) 7-6(5) 6-5 when he was awarded the win but world number five Rublev later successfully appealed the decision and will retain the ranking points and prize money he earned, barring a fine of $36,400 for a code violation.In a post on Instagram, Rublev thanked the appeals committee but said the rules needed a rethink."I hope that in the future, the ATP will take a closer look at this rule and make changes to it so that an official can't force a match outcome without having clear evidence.

—*AP*

Shahbaz Nadeem bids farewell to Int'l cricket

NEW DELHI, 5 MARCH

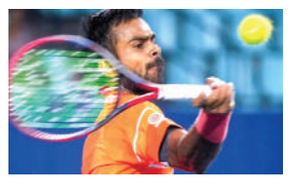
Jharkhand's cricketing stalwart, Shahbaz Nadeem, has announced his retirement from international cricket, culminating a career that spanned over two decades with over 500 wickets in first-class cricket.

Nadeem made his first-class debut back in 2004 against Kerala and took two wickets in the match. Nadeem also played two Test matches for India and made his debut against South Africa in Ranchi in October 2019, where he took four wickets and went on to play his next match against England in 2021.

Also, in IPL, he played a total of 72 matches with the teams of Delhi Daredevils and Sunrisers Hyderabad. From being the leading wicket-taker in the Ranji Trophy. —*PTI*

Sumit Nagal wins on Indian Wells debut

DUBAI, 5 MARCH



Sumit Nagal **PHOTO: X**

Ace Indian tennis player Sumit Nagal brushed past the challenge of American wildcard Stefan Dostanic in straight sets in his first outing at the Indian Wells Masters.

The India No. 1 beat Dostanic in straight sets 6-2, 6-2 in the first round of the qualifying on Monday.

Seeded eighth, Nagal took 68 minutes to emerge winner on his Indian Wells debut without facing a single break point in the entire match. By making the final qualifying round, Nagal assured himself of 10 ranking points and USD 14,400 prize money.

Nagal made history by becoming the first Indian men's singles player in a decade to advance to the second round of the Australian Open.

He also won the Chennai Challengers title, entering the top 100 rankings following the triumph. However, he suffered reverses in Pune and Dubai.

Nagal will take on Seongchan Hong in the second qualifying round on Tuesday.

In a Korean derby, Hong got the better of Seongchan Hong 6-3 6-3 to set up a clash with Nagal for a place in the main draw.

Enjoying a good run of form, Hong made 2 ATP Challenger level finals this year, including in Bengaluru recently. —*PTI*

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Arsenal beat United 6-0 in latest statement win

LONDON, 5 MARCH

Arsenal delivered another statement win in its English Premier League title challenge by thrashing last-placed Sheffield United 6-0 to stay in touch with Liverpool and Manchester City on Monday.

Some home fans left their seats and were seen heading to the exits inside Bramall Lane after 25 minutes when Kai Havertz made it 4-0, adding to strikes from Martin Odegaard and Gabriel Martinelli either side of an own-goal by Jayden Bogle.

With supporters in the away end singing "We're gonna score in a minute," Declan Rice slotted home a fifth in the 39th minute. It meant Arsenal scored five goals in three straight away league games — after West Ham (6-0) and Burnley (5-0) — and tied the record for most goals scored in the first half of a league game.

The visitors weren't finished there, with right-back Ben White becoming the sixth different scorer when lashing a left-foot shot into the far corner in the 58th.

At that stage, Arsenal looked a good bet to threaten the most goals scored by a team in a league game and the competition's biggest margin of victory, with three clubs — Liverpool, Leicester, and Manchester United (twice) — having won 9-0 down the years.

However, Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta's decision to make a raft of substitutions — including removing Bukayo Saka at half-time and others like Rice and Jorginho later on — broke his team's rhythm and Sheffield United's players could breathe slightly easier. Still, it was a good night for Arsenal's goal difference, which is now far superior to that of Liverpool and Man City.

Arsenal's Declan Rice celebrates after scoring his side's fifth goal **PHOTO: AFP**

- Arsenal delivered another statement win in its English Premier League title challenge by thrashing last-placed Sheffield United 6-0 to stay in touch with Liverpool and Manchester City

Arsenal stayed in third place, two points behind Liverpool and a point adrift of City, and has won seven straight games in the league. "A great performance and a big result for us again with the amount of goals we scored and the clean sheet," Arteta said. "The team shows signs of wanting more. That's very positive." The only negative on the night was the sight of Martinelli being helped off with a right ankle injury in the 64th.

Arteta said Martinelli sustained a cut, while Saka was removed because he was feeling sick.

Arsenal could climb into first place — if only briefly — by beating Brentford on Saturday, ahead of Liverpool hosting Man City on Sunday. —*AP*